

Before plastic wrapping, florists made bouquets by gathering flowers by hand, tying the stems with string or ribbon, and using paper, fabric, or baskets for protection and presentation. The materials and style depended on the period, the place, and the purpose of the flowers.

Gathering and tying the stems

A bouquet begins with the flowers themselves, not the wrapper. Florists selected stems, removed some leaves, and arranged the blooms so their colors and shapes worked together. They then secured the bunch with string, twine, or ribbon.

The tie held the flowers in place while leaving the stem ends available for trimming and putting in water. Some bouquets were compact and carefully shaped. Others were looser bunches made from whatever flowers and foliage were available.

Ribbon could be both useful and decorative. It could cover the string or form a bow around the stems, especially for a gift or a wedding bouquet. The flowers did not need an outer wrapper to make a finished arrangement.

Wrapping flowers in paper

Paper was a practical way to protect flowers during a short journey. A florist could fold a sheet around the stems and blooms, then secure it with string. The paper helped keep petals from being rubbed or crushed and gave the recipient something to hold.

Plain paper could serve for an everyday bunch, while decorative paper could make a gift look more formal. The amount used varied. A loose sleeve might cover much of the bouquet, or a smaller piece might sit around the

stems while leaving the flower heads exposed.

Paper was not a substitute for water. Once the flowers reached their destination, the recipient still needed to trim the stems if necessary and place them in a clean container of water.

Using fabric and other materials

Fabric could be wrapped around the stems or used as part of a bouquet's decoration. Lace and ribbon appeared in formal bouquets, particularly those made for weddings. These materials softened the grip around the stems and could be matched to the occasion.

Florists also used foliage as part of the presentation. Leaves around the outside of a bunch provided a green frame for the blooms and helped fill out the shape. They were part of the arrangement rather than a waterproof covering.

Carrying flowers in containers

Not every gift of flowers was a wrapped bouquet. Flowers could be arranged in baskets or other containers, which gave the stems support and made the arrangement easier to carry. A container could also form part of the gift.

For flowers that needed to travel, keeping them cool and getting them back into water mattered more than making the outside look elaborate. Paper and fabric could protect a bunch from handling, but neither kept cut stems supplied with water on its own.

What made the bouquet complete

The arrangement, the tie, and the choice of wrapping all had jobs to do. The tie held the stems together. Paper protected the flowers in transit. Ribbon or fabric could add a decorative finish, while foliage gave the bunch shape.

Plastic later became another wrapping option, but the basic work of choosing, arranging, and securing flowers remained much the same.

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