



Get Fresh

Learn how to bring new life and interest into your home with top tips from Kally Ellis at McQueens

We're spending more on flowers now than ever before and it's easy to see why. Adding a vase of fresh blooms is one of the most simple and cost-effective ways to revitalise a room. Arranging flowers is a simple art that almost anyone can learn – and if you need a little helping hand, there are plenty of courses by leading experts where you can pick up the basics in no time. You might even find that spending more time surrounded by fabulous flora inspires you to consider making a lifestyle change or two!

Kally Ellis, for example, gave up a highly successful career in marketing for a merchant bank to become a florist. She set up McQueens in 1991 and it rapidly became an international sensation, with a whole string of A-list clients. "It

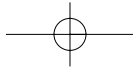
never fails to surprise me when I receive calls about our flowers from Hollywood and Japan," says Kally, who regularly does the flowers for the Oscars.

"It's amazing to think that from a small shop in Clerkenwell, we've built a reputation for quality and innovation that's known the world over. I'm very proud of what we've achieved."

When Kally Ellis set up McQueens, she had one aim in mind. "I wanted to sell simple, stylish flowers that are beautifully presented," she explains. Kally drew on her business experience and relied on her strong sense of colour and design, not to mention her genuine passion for flowers, to create a bold new style that has gained international recognition.

You can benefit from her experience by taking a course at the flagship London shop. The





school's innovative series of floristry courses are suitable for a range of abilities and ambitions from the enthusiastic beginner through to the professional florist looking to acquire the latest skills. The School is led by Luis da Silva, who has fifteen years of experience as a top designer. Despite being one of the leading names in the industry he has a very down to earth, practical approach. His enthusiasm

is infectious and you'll soon be looking at flowers, foliage and containers in a whole new light, and filled with the confidence and skills you need to create your own arrangements. On a one-day course, for example, he might demonstrate up to 20 different ideas, and you'll also enjoy the opportunity to try out some techniques on beautiful blooms that you can take home with pride!



Kally's Top Tips

- When you first get your flowers, trim an inch off the stem (any with woody stems, such as roses, should be cut at a very acute diagonal to maximise the surface area open to the water). Change the water daily, if you have a spare minute – trimming them again every time you change the water will increase their longevity.
- A great knack to learn is making a hand tied arrangement. This involves arranging blooms in your hand in a spiral, carefully slanting each new stem against the previous one until you create a softly-rounded shape.
- Alternatively, you can cut them all to the same length and pop them into a vase. They should fall quite beautifully.
- You can make your flowers last a lot longer by adding flower food, or a sterilising tablets, such as Milton. A quarter of a tablet in a normal-sized vase will help to keep the water clear and bacteria-free. Also bear in mind that flowers last a lot longer if kept away from direct sunlight and heat – even bowls of fresh fruit can make blooms wilt more quickly.
- Choose flowers that are seasonal and local – they look better and often last longer. Avoid tropicals such as strelitzias, ginger lilies, heliconias and protea that travel thousands of miles and look out of place in period homes.
- If you're new to arranging flowers, try not to mix too many varieties – a single type can have a huge impact. You get greater impact from a big vase of tulips on their own than a cheap mixed bouquet.

Think carefully about your containers –the following are all very useful:

- 1 A tall, straight-sided cylinder vase for long stems such as lilies, amaryllis or gladioli.
- 2 A square tank, (perfect for coffee tables). You can fill it with spring flowers cut quite short so they're just above the edge.
- 3 A fish bowl. This can be lined with a few flexible stems such as tulips, orchids or calla lilies – put the stem in an inch of water and swirl the flower heads around the inside of the glass to get huge impact for little effort!
- 4 A bouquet vase that is about 10cm at the neck and wider below – this will be ideal for any hand-tied bouquet you receive, as the neck holds it at binding point (don't cut the string until the bouquet is in place).
- 5 Bud vases look fantastic down the centre of a table with one stem in each vase. You could use shot glasses, tumblers, little jugs, scented-candle holders, milk bottles or jam jars to make a huge impact.

Treat Yourself

Courses at McQueens start daily at 10am and finish at 4pm, with breakfast and a delicious lunch provided. There are special days available or you might like to book a longer course. For a detailed look at the different options, click on mcqueens.co.uk or call 020 7251 5505.

