Module 1: Your Introduction to Floristry

In this module you will learn:

- About the basics of floristry
- A brief history of floristry
- The various ages of floristry and how it evolved
- About modern floristry and the science it has become over the years
- What are the requirements that are ideal for a career in floristry?
- Your responsibilities as a florist

1.1: Floristry: Its meaning

Floristry includes everything that has to do with flowers, its care, handling, production, trading and other commercial activities involving flowers.

It also includes such activities as sale and purchase of flowers and plants, the design of floral arrangements or flower arranging, their display and delivery. Florists who are wholesalers, deal in bulk flower trading. This includes selling floristry related supplies to retail florists who, in turn, create arrangements, provide related services and sell to consumers directly.

Most of the raw materials that are supplied to the floristry industry come from the producers of the cut flower. Florist e-shops and bricks and mortar florists are the main dealers in
cut flowers, though supermarkets and fuel stations also carry cut flowers and bouquets.

Creating flower arrangements, bouquets, wreaths and other such products using flowers, foliage and other organic material is called floral arts or floral design. It also includes creating arrangements in vases, bowls, trays, and other such holders using herbs, grasses, leaves and twigs, etc. along with flowers. Very often the two terms of floristry and floral design are used interchangeable as synonyms of each other. Florists deal with plants and flowers and work with them to create floral arrangements of many sorts; they are most often retailers. Floristry is different from Floristics – which studies the interrelationship and distribution of plants of various species in an area. Floristry is also different to horticulture, which is more broadly relevant to the growing of plants and flowers in order that their lifecycle can be enhanced as much as possible, and subsequently, upon cutting, will remain fresh and sale worthy.

Floristry also involves understanding the customers’ expectations and requirements – where the ability to produce a selection of floral art and design for different needs such as bouquets, wreaths, corsage, nosegays, etc. is also important.

It is said that flower arranging will give one peace of mind and may also lead you to attaining patience and strength in adversity.

If only the first of the claims is true, then see how very worthwhile it is to pass precious time in selecting flowers and placing them into a vase for the pleasure and delight of those who will look upon them. The simple fact of dealing with living material, whose beauty is worthy of respect and of working with one’s hands on something which is peaceful in itself and creative in its function – these seem to be reasons enough for the widespread appeal of floristry.
1.2: The Basics

There is no hard and fast or definitive and prescriptive set of rules for floristry.

Similar to any art form it overwhelmingly boils down to one’s personal taste and preferences. This applies to the flowers chosen, the choices of colour, and the desired effect which all amounts to individual choice.

Personal taste will invariably influence our perceptions and appreciation of the ephemeral art of the arrangement of flowers. How different flowers are brought together by a florist often elicits emotional reactions or recollections which affect the way a person interprets a floral display; you can’t quite put a finger on it.

Having said this, let us concede that there are practical and basic guidelines required for creative techniques, whether for a larger wedding display, or for a single buttonhole. Such knowledge is a necessity in all floral creation. Great cooks have their basic recipes which are the foundation of any dish they make, but without rigidly sticking to the recipe, spontaneous creativity flourishes and always produces something a little different. In this sense, ‘Floristry’ is a similar creative process where certain basics are adhered to, yet there remains great latitude to be innovative.

The basics need to be solid from the outset before any creativity begins.
1.3: A Brief History

Traces, images and descriptions of flower decoration are found throughout history. We can see on tombs, and in reliefs from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and ancient Rome, how different principles of design prevailed in the East and West down the ages.

The dead were honoured with Wreaths, Garlands and Festoons, yet the style used today for garlands, festoons and wreaths has not varied greatly in comparison to the ancient techniques.

The arranging of flowers is an ancient form of artistic endeavour dating way back to ancient Egypt.

Throughout our world history, people have always coveted the natural beauty of fresh flowers. Just like it is today, floral arrangements brought colour and nature to everyday scenarios and also to special events. Although floral arrangement styles have clearly varied in history and across continents, they all had purpose and meaning embedded in it.

1.4: The Ages of Floristry

From the earliest times it was the Gardener who made all the decorations personally, assisted by an apprentice.

Flower decorating ‘just’ had to be beautiful as its purpose and the gardeners made bunches with what was presently
available during the seasons. So it remained for centuries until the dedicated art of arrangement and floristry emerged. The story of floristry is closely linked to the evolution of garden design, to general developments in taste and culture, and most relevantly with the decorative function of flowers in the home throughout history.

**Ancient Egypt (2800-28 BC)**

Egyptians used flowers from as early as 2500 BC in their religious ceremonies, tomb decorations, and for home decoration. Cut flowers were arranged in urns and vases and included for their religious or symbolic import, which included roses, violets, narcissus, water lilies, poppies and jasmine. Garlands worn by loved ones at funerals were left at the burial tombs. Egyptian floral design was simple and contained elements of repetition.

**Ancient Greece (600-150 BC)**

The Greeks’ use of flowers was for their adornment, while wreaths and garlands were used in their celebrations, such as for weddings and births. Unlike other eras, vases were not used. Laurel wreaths were famously presented to Olympian winners. The Greeks are attributed to the creation of the cornucopia, or ‘horn of plenty’. Most Grecian floral arrangements were symmetrical, while the flower colours were less important than their fragrance and symbolism.

**Ancient Rome (28-325 AD)**

Romans continued the similar customs of the Greeks, however, their garlands, crowns and wreaths became more elaborate. Wreaths symbolized military victories. The foliage usually utilised by the Romans and the Greeks included oak leaves, acorns, ivy and laurel. Flowers were occasionally arranged in cornucopias and baskets and their arrangements were generally very brightly coloured and fragrant.
Byzantine Period (320-600 AD)

Greek and Roman styles continued during this period, and fruit was added to the floral designs. Garlands were just as popular as those made by the Greeks, but were assembled differently. Using more leaves and tiny flowers in their garlands gave them a ‘twisted’ appearance. Very stylized and symmetrical arrangements were placed in large baskets, goblets or other containers. Colour schemes were analogous and colour neighbours on the colour wheel, but accented by a complementary colour.

Ancient China (500 BC – 100 AD)

The Chinese arranged flowers for religious ceremonies, and freshly cut flowers were found in temples and in home altars. The emphasis upon individual form, textures and colours in floral arrangements was highly inspired by the Chinese. The Chinese were amongst the first people to specifically design baskets for holding flowers, they were made from bamboo, willow, reed or wood. The use of artificial flowers made from silk is attributed to the Chinese.

The art of flower arranging arrived in Europe around 1000 CE. Initially, it was particularly popular in monasteries and churches where plants and flowers were used for food, and also for decoration. When the Crusaders returned from the Middle East, they brought back new and interesting plants and, as a result of this, the European countries began to experiment with plants that had been previously unknown to them.

The Renaissance Period (1400-1600 AD)

Flower design began in Italy and gained popularity across Europe. Paintings of exaggerated floral displays in vases became popular. Flowers, fruits, and foliage were woven into garlands that decorated walls and vaulted ceilings and the flowers used included carnations, lilies, daisies, roses and violets. Christmas wreaths were introduced during the
Renaissance era.

**Georgian Arrangements (AD 1714 -1760)**

Floral designs in this period were symmetrical, formal and often tightly arranged with a variety of flowers. Oriental design had become popular due to the active maritime trading. Towards the end of the era the informal designs were more important, chiefly due to the belief that the flowers’ fragrance was believed to rid the air of diseases. Small, handheld arrangements called tussie-mussies or nosegays were used to carry around sweet perfumes, this also helped to conceal the odours of society as bathing was often imagined to be unhealthy.

**Victorian Period (1837-1901)**

For the Victorians, floral design became extravagant, nearly over the top. Containers like flared vases and porcelain or silver urns were used. Oval and round shaped arrangements became typical, and triangular and circular arrangements of roses were common. Other flowers like lilies, tulips, asters and dahlias, were also regularly used. Floral design was taught and recognized as art.

1.5: Modern Floristry Science

These days floristry is like a science; we now work thematically with Colours, Form, Texture, Structure, Proportions, Groups, Optic Influence, Optic Balance, Rhythm and different ‘motion’ forms.

Moreover, we have different flowers available all the year through, and in this we are blessed.
With an ever unfolding interest in the natural world and in flowers, the floral industry continues to expand. The increase in educational institutes offering education and training in floristry and floral design has also grown to include many universities and also certified design schools worldwide.

**Disciplines that are related to floral design and floristry include:**

- botanical illustration and other art forms
- botany
- creative direction
- floriculture
- flower gardening
- flower preservation
- landscape architecture

**FACT**

The honour of the most expensive flower or plant ever goes to the black hyacinth. Three bulbs of this plant went for £150,000 in 1997.

*Source: The Telegraph UK*
1.6: Floral Decoration

As we have briefly seen, down through the ages, floral decoration has become the art of arranging living or dried plant material for the adornment of the body or of the home, or as a significant element of our public ceremonies, festivals, and religious rituals.

Since civilizations’ earliest days, humans have utilised flowers, and it came to play an important role in folk festivals, religious ceremonies, public celebration of all types, and naturally, in courtship. The sophisticated culture has generally expressed a love for flower decorating with careful arrangements in specifically chosen containers, whereas other cultures have used them quite informally: strewn around, or made into garlands and wreaths, even simply casually put into water holding vessels without care of arrangement.

Presently the art of flower arranging is enjoyed by men and women all over the world. Whether chosen for pure beauty or for symbolism, flowers can and do bring joy and beauty to just about any situation.

1.7: Requirements for a Florist

First and foremost, one must have a keen interest in flowers. If you do have that keenness, then nothing you encounter in your role as a florist, will make you feel that it is a job or a drudge.

- You must have creativity for arranging flowers. Anyone may arrange flowers into a bouquet, but it is how your bouquet differs from other florists that matters.
Customers require quality and also exclusive designs. Every person likes to feel special.

You need to have a great colour coordination. If an arrangement is creative but lacking in colour combinations, the arrangement is affected.

Original design, along with beautiful colours, create saleable arrangements.

A florist should have a warm personality and be easily approachable.

Reading a customer’s mind is a florist’s skill. Knowing what to offer a customer for their particular event is a perception skill essential for a professional florist.

Finally, a florist needs to understand the urgency of an order if a customer requests this. If an order is placed at the last moment, then understanding the urgency and deadline will endear your professionalism to customers, who will return to you again and again.

To become a florist, one must understand what the responsibilities entail.

1.8: Responsibilities as a Florist

It is hard work to be a florist. There is always something to do or take care of.

The main responsibilities of a florist include:

- When a shipment arrives, the unpacking of new stock.
- Conditioning and maintaining the condition of plants and flowers.
- Watering the plants.
- Fixing the price of stock.
- Attending to walk-in customers, and those contacting via phone or e-mail.
- Taking down orders and details accurately.
- Maintaining a clean and attractive shop.
- Managing the cash flow and daily accounts.
- Creating floral arrangements for display and to sell at the shop.
- Advising your customers about plant and flower after-care.

Being a florist is not a cake walk. You have to be constantly on your feet to be good at your job.

**Assignment**

**Source Suppliers**

*Estimated Time: 20 minutes*

Download and complete the worksheet to help you find suppliers – A handy place to start is with the article in the course side bar titled “Sourcing Flowers / Wholesalers List”

[Download PDF]

**Module Summary**

**Lessons Learned:**
At the end of this module you have got a good understanding of what floristry is and how it works.

Flowers and plants have been used for millennia as a means of adornment of self and of our buildings, spaces, and much more. Flowers speak a language of their own. Over the eons, floristry has grown from a simple bunch of flowers and foliage gathered together, to a very sophisticated science which involves use of flowers and plants to control emotions, create an atmosphere and express creativity.

The job of a florist is fairly difficult. Not only do they have to create the arrangements, they have to take care of their flowers and plants, look after their business, meet the client, sell the arrangements, and a lot more.
This module should help you decide whether you wish to continue with your work or look for another profession.

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