

Historical florists used knives, scissors, and pruning shears to cut flower stems. For thick, woody branches, a small saw could also be useful.

Knives for everyday stem work

A sharp knife was a basic tool for preparing cut flowers. It could trim a stem to length and make an angled cut at its base before the flower went into water. A knife also gave the user control when removing leaves or cutting away damaged parts.

Florists and gardeners have used several kinds of knife, including folding knives made for garden work. The blade had to be sharp enough to cut cleanly. A dull blade could tear or crush plant tissue instead.

Cutting with a knife required care. The stem needed support, and the blade had to be directed away from the hand holding it. Soft stems were generally easier to cut than hard, woody ones.

Scissors for lighter stems

Scissors were useful for thin, soft stems and for small pieces of foliage. Their two blades made them familiar and convenient for close work. They could also cut string or other materials used to tie flowers together.

Not every pair of scissors was suited to every flower. A heavy stem could be awkward to fit between small blades, and forcing it could damage both the stem and the tool. For tougher material, a florist could reach for shears instead.

The terms used for cutting tools were not always precise. Scissors and shears both have two blades, but shears generally suggest a larger or more robust tool.

Pruning shears for tougher growth

Pruning shears, also called secateurs, were made to cut stems and small branches that needed more force than a knife or ordinary scissors could comfortably provide. They could handle woody material used in arrangements as well as thicker flower stems.

Different designs cut in different ways. Bypass shears have blades that pass one another. Anvil shears have a cutting blade that presses against a flat surface. The condition of the tool mattered as much as its design: clean, sharp blades were better suited to making a neat cut.

These tools were not all interchangeable. A practical choice depended on the material:

- A knife for controlled trimming of individual stems.
- Scissors for fine stems, foliage, and tying material.
- Pruning shears for thicker stems and small branches.
- A saw for wood too thick for the available shears.

Saws for woody branches

A small saw could cut branches that were too thick or hard for hand shears. This was useful when working with woody plants, though it would have been unnecessary for most ordinary flower stems. The size of the branch and the tools at hand determined the choice.

Historical tool collections varied by place, period, and kind of work. The central task stayed much the same: choose a blade that fits the stem and can cut it cleanly.

A good companion read: first hours of cut flower care