

Understanding Traditional Containers

By Connie Baird Tenarky District

What is a traditional container anyway, and why are some judges so picky about how truly "traditional" they should be?

Probably one of the most difficult decisions to make when arranging roses for an ARS sanctioned rose show is the container. Since it is the foundation of your design, the container will often make or break your arrangement.

Choosing a traditional container sounds easy. But one of the most common comments on a judge's note card reads, "Container not traditional enough." It can be confusing and frustrating to an arranger, especially a novice. Even the ARS *Guidelines for Judging Rose Arrangements* say very little regarding the container for traditional arrangements. The "traditional" container critics could be a little more flexible, but they are the judges awarding the ribbons, and until ARS gives a little more guidance on the subject of the container, the judges' opinion counts. So here's one arrangement judge's insight. Maybe it will help.

The ARS "traditional" style tends to mirror the European style of arranging. So, when choosing a traditional container, think in terms of the classical. The style is more formal; therefore the container needs to be just as formal. Classical urns, vases, candlestick holders and compotes work well in the traditional style. Everyday items used in traditional arrangements are often the ones that tend to be discredited as "not traditional." If you have a choice between Aunt Edith's Grecian urn and Grandma's tea kettle, the Grecian urn will be your safest bet. This has been the trend, not the rule.

A container should never dominate or compete with the arrangement. If your eye goes straight to the container and not the flowers, there is a problem. Also, the container's color should complement the flowers, not detract. White is acceptable in a container, but only when the white is repeated in the design. Clear glass is usually a no-no, yet I have seen ornate crystal vases used beautifully. Be sure the container is proportionally in balance with your arrangement and is visually stable. If the design looks like it's going to tip (even if it's not), the balance is off.

Points are given for Creativity and Expressiveness in your arrangement. How can you be expressive and still be traditional? Mood. Let your arrangement express a mood.

For example, yellow can be bright and cheery, white very formal, purple somewhat regal. Dark tones can give a somber mood, while pastels create a happy, carefree feeling. Choose your colors to reflect the emotion of the arrangement's title. The traditional container can express the same mood. A dark pewter urn will generate a solid, steadfast feeling; a silver candlestick holder contributes to a more formal and regal atmosphere.

Arrangement judges have guidelines with principles and elements of design to help them make difficult choices. Often small things like "traditional container" are personal preferences and tastes that factor into the final decision of a judge. The formal mood of the traditional class has "traditionally" affected the thinking and decisions of the judges.

