



The element of

Texture

Nature is beautiful through variety. Though texture has less obvious appeal than colour, the unique characteristics and textural variety of plant material add a stimulating dimension to any design.

Exploring how textures can interact and influence each other presents a special challenge to the flower arranger and offers rich opportunities to search nature for exciting textures to use in unexpected ways to engage the viewer and please the responsive eye.

Texture describes the tangible and visible surface quality of plant material. Nature provides an infinite variety of textures with subtle differences and similarities and

observation will confirm that there are many textures for the floral artist to explore.

A surface maybe complex, sometimes unusual, coarse, fine, striated, deeply ridged or highly reflective. Some surfaces look solid and soft at the same time, depending on the angle from which they are viewed and where the light falls. A carnation appears visually rough in texture but is smooth to touch. Sometimes the detail on the reverse side of a leaf proves more interesting.

Photographs: Chrissie Harten



Opuntia engelmannii



Clematis tangutica



Peperomia caperata
'Shumi Red'



Kalanchoe tomentosa

Many materials are inherently interesting texturally – waxy *Magnolia* flowers, spiky *Araucaria*, skeletal *Opuntia*, pitted *Lotus* pods, knobby gourds, pansies with the depth and intensity of velvet or the soft, silky seed heads of *Clematis*. Flowers such as anthuriums have a gloss and look almost lacquered. The tiny vegetative life forms of lichen and moss can add textural interest, either in a green moist condition or muted and subtle dry state. Some plant materials have more than one textural quality such as *Onopordon* leaves that are prickly and woolly at the same time. Some house plants have distinctive ridges and others have wrinkled surfaces – the corrugated leaves of *Peperomia*, the felted surface of *Kalanchoe tomentosa* or the puckered and hairy surface of *Begonia masoniana*. The wonderfully varied textures of fruit and vegetables have fascinated still life artists from the Old Masters to the present day.

Juxtaposed textures emphasise the specific quality of each by complementing and providing vitality. Contrast of textures can provide a dynamic factor, contributing excitement, attracting attention and relieving monotony. Tension can be created between opposing elements – smooth and rough, dull and shiny and so the design is energised and the viewing eye stimulated. However, control must be exercised as too many contrasting textures can result in confusion and disrupt the unity of a design. One texture should be dominant with the others being of less importance in order to encourage the eye to travel through the design. Rough textures hold the attention longer than smooth and appear to advance while smooth surfaces seem to recede. This can be used to create depth in a design. The manner in which texture is distributed through a design can affect the balance. Coarse textures appear visually heavier than smooth or fine textures. A shiny leaf can be placed centrally for strong interest in a traditional design where more visual weight is required. Repetition of textures can achieve a rhythmical sequence.



Arranger: Marilyn Williams
Photograph: Howard Nutt

The selection of textures should be inter-related with colour choice. The light reflected from shiny leaves can intensify the colour of flowers placed next to them. If flowers are finely textured the colour appears softer. Materials that possess a sharpness of texture can prevent a neutral palette from becoming dull, particularly in a monochromatic design when variation in texture achieves greater impact. Where colour is subdued, as in a dried arrangement, sharp contrasting textures are necessary to enliven the design.

Texture can be used as an expressive means of communication by capturing a mood or eliciting a response, it can evoke reaction in the viewer to the subject portrayed. Plant materials should have characteristics related to the idea they are intended to convey in order to interpret a theme and further the atmosphere implied. If chosen carefully, different surfaces can generate a feeling of tranquillity or drama, luxury or coarseness. The texture and distinctive structure of old weathered wood can convey a sense of antiquity, silky textures with gentility and elegance, prickly thorns with aggression, velvety textures with opulence and shiny surfaces with sophistication or modernity.

right 'Time to wake up' – spring transforms the dead of winter.

Arranger: Pat Dibben
Photograph: Oliver Gordon,
courtesy of *The Flower Arranger* magazine



left 'A touch of Tudor'

Arranger: Sally Taylor
Photograph: Katherine Kear

Bold, sharp contrasts of texture are often used in modern designs when there are fewer components with no transition to reduce the effect, allowing the textural qualities to be more clearly defined and easily appreciated. Large quantities of textured plant material can be grouped together in modern mass arrangements to create bold areas of interest. Exaggerated contrasts in texture are often played against each other in abstract designs. Spheres decorated with a variety of textured plant material add interest to a contemporary design and leaves can be manipulated by weaving or plaiting to alter the surface appearance to suit the design purpose.



top right Detail from the exhibit at the 2013 RHS Chelsea Flower Show by the SAFAS Area of NAFAS

Photograph: Chrissie Harten

centre left A seascape design

Arranger: Jane Burns
Photograph: Jane Burns

centre right 'Variations on a Berry'

Arranger: Katherine Kear
Photograph: Katherine Kear

left Wool scape collage

Arranger: Jane Burns
Photograph: Jane Burns

Twiggy structures have strong textural qualities and flower arrangers appreciate the value of utilising material such as coloured sisal (*Agave sisalana*) felt, wool and other natural materials.

Adjacent blocks or layers of textured plant material provide impact and carefully chosen textures in pavé or groundwork brings accent and definition.



Arranger: Katherine Kear
Photograph: Katherine Kear



Arranger: Jane Burns
Photograph: Jane Burns



Arranger: Katherine Kear
Photograph: Katherine Kear

Mission Statement

The National Association of Flower Arrangement Societies (NAFAS) is an educational charity dedicated to the promotion of the artistic use of all types of plant material through the medium of its flower clubs for both adults and children.

NAFAS is concerned about the environment and members uphold the principles of conservation and preservation of rare and endangered plants and flowers.

With over 961 clubs and in the region of 45,000 members throughout the United Kingdom, NAFAS is in a unique position to encourage the art of flower arranging through demonstrations, classes, exhibitions, festivals and show work.

NAFAS is affiliated to the Royal Horticultural Society and is a founder member of the World Association of Flower Arrangers.



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