

Instructions for Corsage and Boutonniere

For girls, a small wrist corsage is lovely, and for boys a boutonniere for their shirt or suit lapel is customary. Any florist should be able to make these but you may need to provide a few of the flowers for them, as well as the following suggestions:

General instructions:

The corsages and boutonnieres should be small, about four inches in width. The typical elastic wrist corsage bands covered in satin are ideal but it is usually necessary to measure the child's wrist and to shorten the elastic inside the covering so the corsage will not slip. There are also silver cone-shaped boutonniere holders that work very well for the boys. Special floral glue will be needed to secure all flowers, and a very small piece of water-saturated floral oasis to be glued inside the boutonniere cone.

All flowers, including those gathered from the garden, need to be conditioned, that is, fully hydrated, before they are assembled. Condition all garden flowers before they are brought to the florist. Cut the stems under water and immediately place in containers of warm water; keep in a cool place for several hours. The warm water helps the stems to absorb water more quickly. It is helpful to use small, narrow containers like juice glasses to keep fragile stems like Violets, Forget-Me-Nots and Pansies upright so the blossoms do not fall into the water and discolor.

Floral Notes:

Plan well ahead. Not all of the flowers in the novena are commercially available from florists. You will need to locate a source for some of them. A perfectly acceptable alternative is to substitute silk or artificial flowers for those you cannot provide from your own garden or those of friends. Even so, some artificial versions of the flowers in the Novena can be hard to find as well.

Roses: Red spray roses or miniature roses are perfect. A single rose is sufficient.

Violets: As First Communions are typically celebrated in May, the spring garden or woodland will usually offer an abundance of these flowers. Any color will do; two or three are all that is needed.

Forget-Me-Nots: Two perennial varieties, *Myosotis sylvatica*, a common garden plant and *Myosotis palustris (scorpioides)* a common wildflower that grows alongside streams or in wet places, bloom for several weeks in spring. The stems are very thin and fragile. Follow conditioning procedures described above. One or two stems are all that is needed.

Lily-of-the-Valley: Usually in bloom in the spring, these must be gathered from the home garden as they are not usually commercially available. Use two or three shortened stems.

Bluebells: Either *Hyacinthoides (Endymion) non-scripta*, a fall-planted bulb that blooms in

spring, or *Mertensia virginica*, a spring wildflower often planted in the perennial garden can be used. Otherwise the small Grape Hyacinths (*Muscari*) offer a perfect substitute, and florists can order them from their supplier.

If using *Mertensia* from the garden be sure to condition properly before bringing to the florist.

Daisies: A number of daisy-type flowers are available from the florist, such as asters. Some may be a little on the large side to fit well with the smaller scale of the corsage or boutonniere. White spray asters work well, or you may be able to find stems of smaller artificial daisies to substitute instead.

Buttercups: Several species of Buttercups (*Ranunculus*) bloom in the spring. Some are even considered weeds, but the small flowers, stems and leaves can all be used. A double yellow *Ranunculus* is commercially available to florists; they are a little larger so just one would be needed.

Lilies: These pose a special problem: size. As the Lily is much too large to use, another flower must be substituted. Single florets from a white Hyacinth, Freesia, or *Polyanthus* (Tuberose) resemble the lily in shape and may be utilized.

Pansies: Many colorful Pansies are available either in the spring garden or from garden centers in May. Try to find flowers with the dark markings that make them resemble the little faces described in the novena.

Corsage Assembly:

As the wrist corsage is going to be much smaller than normal, the metal clasps on the center base plate of the band need to be trimmed off and any sharp edges covered with floral tape. Cover the metal plate holder on the band by hot gluing a few artificial leaves on top, and also underneath, just enough to hide the edges of the metal plate. Make a loopy bow with narrow white or iridescent ribbon and hot glue to the center of the leaf-covered plate. The flowers will then be fastened down into the center of the bow between the loops using special floral glue, which seals the stems, and holds both fresh and artificial material securely.

The Rose should be placed first and then backed by taller stems like Lily-of-the-Valley and Bluebells. Other flowers can be placed into the loops and around the sides to cover the edges of the leaf-covered base plate.

Boutonniere Assembly:

The boutonniere cone should be filled with a little piece of wet oasis enclosed in plastic wrap so any moisture in the oasis does not drip from the bottom of the cone.

It may be easier to work on the boutonniere by inserting the pointed base into a piece of dry floral foam as a stand to hold it in a vertical position during assembly.

Glue the Rose in place first, in the center of the small oasis cone and leaning slightly towards the back. Place the taller stems of Lily-of-the-Valley and Bluebells behind the rose on either side of it. Then fill in with the other flowers.

Mist the corsages and boutonnieres with a hydrating spray following instructions and then place in clear plastic boxes and keep refrigerated. It is best to prepare them either the evening before, or very early the morning of First Communion Day, as delicate flowers like Violets and Forget-Me-Nots do not last long in an arrangement.