With their beauty, color, and scent, flowers serve as grace notes during the mourning period, whether at the visitation, the funeral service, the graveside, or the home of the bereaved. While roses, lilies, carnations, and other traditional choices have never gone out of style, arrangements that are more personalized with sympathy notes are increasingly common. The family usually provides flowers for the altar or dais, where other gifts of flowers may be displayed as well.

The etiquette considerations of sending flowers largely involve who sends what:

Floral baskets and living plants. Friends, coworkers, and relatives may choose to send flowers. Virtually any type of flower or plant is suitable and can be chosen to reflect the personality of the deceased. Flowers can be sent to the bereaved's home, workplace, or to the funeral home.

Floral wreaths, crosses, and sprays. These are often sent by a group. They are also a good choice for companies and associations that want to honor the deceased. They may be displayed at the funeral home, or on the altar or dais at the service.

Floral tributes. Good friends or family members often choose to send this type of arrangement to the location where the service will be held. Sometimes floral tributes are personalized designs based on the deceased's occupation, clubs, hobbies, or even his personality.

Casket arrangements. Family members--siblings, children, or grandchildren of the deceased--may supply lid sprays for the coffin. Smaller arrangements, also provided by the family, can be placed inside the casket by the funeral director.

There are no rules for timing the delivery of flowers, but it's good to get them to the bereaved as soon as possible--either at home, to the house of worship, or to the funeral home in time for the visitation or funeral. However, some close friends send flowers to the home over the course of a few months as a reminder of their love and concern.

A group of people may pool their resources for an arrangement. If the list of names on the enclosure card is long, the senders can be identified as a group: "The Murchison Family," "The Sixth Street Book Club," or "The Copyediting Department, Sun-Light Publishing." Later, a card can be signed by the individuals who chipped in and then be sent to the bereaved.

It's necessary to record the receipt of flowers so that the givers can be thanked. Someone at the funeral home or house of worship should make a record of any flowers sent there, while a family member or close friend can keep track of flowers sent to the home of the bereaved or elsewhere.