
# FLOWER TESTING: GET LAB-LIKE RESULTS FROM YOUR SHOP

> There's one question you can predict from pretty much every customer: "How long will my flowers last?" It builds trust and encourages sales if you can offer a specific answer. You don't need a fancy laboratory to determine flowers' expiration date. You have all the necessary tools in your shop or home to grade flower quality and determine how many days a flower will last in a typical consumer environment.

## Prepare the Proper Sample

For a legitimate test, process flowers as you normally do, but follow some basic ground rules to prevent other factors from interfering with the results. Always use clean, sterilized buckets, cutters and vases, and sanitize storage and work areas. Make fresh hydration and flower food solutions. These steps will eliminate contamination from external sources of bacteria, major culprits in stealing valuable days of vase life. Use flowers that have recently arrived, not old or stored flowers. It is important to follow proper handling procedures to get accurate, reliable and repeatable results.

Choose flowers of uniform stage, size and quality from the same shipment and supplier, avoiding diseased, damaged or broken stems. You'll need to test multiple flowers: Obtain these randomly from several bunches, so you have a total of at least 12 to 15 stems per variety or flower type.

## Get Testy

Remove bottom foliage so none is submerged in solution and use a clean, sharp knife to cut stems to the same length. Place the flowers directly into a commercial hydration solution following instructions and hold overnight at 35 F (but hold tropical flowers between 55 F and 60 F), or put them directly into vases or floral foam containing flower food.

Place flowers in an area similar to a home or office environment. Temperature should be between 70 F to 75 F, and flowers should stay under lighted conditions for 10 to 12 hours a day. Keep away from drafts and heat sources. If your shop is small and you have no room for setting out vases, evaluate them at home. Place flowers on a dining room or living room table so you experience exactly what your customer does. Whatever location you choose, keep all vases in the test together, so you expose them all to the same environmental conditions. Just as your customer would do, add plain water when the vase/floral foam solution gets too low.

## Scrutinize The Sample

Record the start date of your "consumer-simulated" experiment. Examine flowers daily and record the date when they no longer meet consumers' standards due to petal wilting, drop or discoloration. Although this is a 'subjective' task, be consistent; when in doubt, ask yourself if you would use the flower(s) in a centerpiece if you were entertaining.

Note other quality issues, such as flowers not opening, premature flower fading, leaf yellowing, leaf drop or evidence of disease. Your observations can be simple: "good" or "bad." These notes are invaluable when assessing overall quality and will help you identify varieties that perform well — and which to quit buying. When all flowers have been dated for vase life, calculate the average by adding the individual stems' longevity together and dividing by the total. This will allow you to compare, for example, the vase life of two rose cultivars such as 'Freedom' and 'Vendela'.

## Give Them A Grade

Your results will provide a good indication of your flower quality for that particular shipment. For reliable results, repeat the test with the same varieties under the same conditions. You should incorporate quality testing anytime you're evaluating a new floral product, a new variety or a new supplier. To get even more accurate results — and to prove your resolve to offer top quality products — design a system for your customers to send information back on how long their arrangement held up (now *that's* a design that "leaves a lasting impression.").

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