



## BEAT THE HEAT-LOVIN' BACTERIA

> As the mercury rises, so does the bacteria count. Consequently, the summer is a great time not only for weddings (and vacations) but also for adopting more thorough cleaning habits to keep bacteria at bay. But don't worry, you don't have to spend your whole summer vacation on care and handling procedures. Here's a quick and painless protocol to ensure your buds stay their freshest in the summer heat.

### Initial Inspection

When you receive your flowers, inspect them — not a few hours later, but right away. First, **check the temperature** of the heads of the flowers with a probe thermometer. You don't have to check all the flowers in a box; two or three should be representative. The temperature should range from 33 F to 44 F. Then, **make sure there is no moisture inside the sleeves**. Moisture indicates that temperatures have fluctuated widely. With higher than recommended temperatures, flowers have an increased chance of having the fungus Botrytis; and moisture only helps it spread. If the flowers are too hot or show signs of moisture, contact your supplier.

After inspection, get the flowers into the cooler. **Don't let flowers sit outside your cooler**, waiting to be processed. I spend most of my time visiting wholesalers and retailers around the country, and all too often I witness flowers "in

waiting" outside the coolers. Keeping your flowers in the proper temperature is always important; in the summer, it is imperative due to the heat.

### Prior to Processing

Before you even think about processing the flowers, make sure everything they come in contact with is clean. Now it is time to process your flowers. You should **have clean buckets, tools and flower food ready** before your flowers arrive. Again, the enemy bacteria grow faster in the warm months, so make sure you clean your buckets and tools after each use. Tools should be cleaned three to four times a day with a diluted spray bottle, such as Floralife D.C.D. **Don't rinse after cleaning**. Bacteria-fighting chemicals will last longer if you allow them to air dry.

### Cool It

Now your flowers are ready for the cooler. Summer will test your equipment, so be sure to monitor the temperature. The best way to do this? **Stick a thermometer in a bucket of water**. Bucket temperature is really more critical to flowers' wellbeing than is air temperature, which also tends to fluctuate. And don't forget to **clean your coolers thoroughly each quarter**. This includes drip pans, coils, filters and the compressor.

### Design and Delivery Dos

As you put together arrangements, **use finishing sprays**, especially if you're in an arid climate. Finishing sprays give your flowers added hydration before they reach an air-conditioned home.

After following these tips, don't stop at delivery. Make sure your vans — your coolers away from your cooler — are clean. Also, make sure your drivers know to **run the air conditioning in the van before loading it**. And if your customer has come to pick up flowers, remind them that they are like small children and pets: they're perishable (and precious). **Don't leave them in the heat** with the windows rolled up.

These are simple tips, but as I travel throughout the country visiting flower shops, wholesale warehouses and mass marketers, I rarely see these basic guidelines followed. In the summer, care and handling is paramount to assure flowers beat the heat. And while you may want to take shortcuts when you're busy preparing for a big wedding, avoid the temptation. Replacing flowers in an arrangement will cost you more time and materials in the end. 🌸

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