

# Care & Handling

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The frantic demands of Christmas and New Year's are behind us and for a few weeks, before the pressures and needs of Valentine's Day make themselves known, we can relax—just a little.

During this period of short days with little sunshine, perhaps you should give a bit more thought to the quality of the flowers you are receiving and the care and handling methods you use.

As winter takes firmer grip on the land here in the northern hemisphere, the problems of the flower producer seem to intensify.

Days as short as they'll ever be, light intensity as low as it will ever be, are the norm for January and early February.

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The lack of adequate natural light is the limiting growth factor for greenhouse-produced flower crops.

With minimal light intensity and duration, photosynthesis is also at a minimum. With photosynthesis carried on at low levels, the amount of growth and development is also minimized. Most important of all is the fact that carbohydrate production within plant tissue is at its lowest during the months of winter.

As a result of low carbohydrate content, cut flowers harvested at this time of year do not have the lasting life of those produced during the high light intensity periods of late spring, summer and early fall.

What this means to you is that you must pay special attention to the care and handling of the flowers you sell to ensure customer satisfaction.

Let's look at the steps to follow.

First and foremost is immediate unpacking and examination of the flowers when received from your supplier.

At this time of year freezing injury is of most importance. Make certain the flowers have not been exposed to freezing temperatures. Once frozen, the only possible next move is to the trash container.

How badly dehydrated are they? If cut flowers have been in transit several days, they may be severely dried out.

If so, recut the stems and

place them in a hydrating solution, out of drafts and in the refrigerator until they have become crisp and turgid.

Are they crops that are sensitive to ethylene? Then use one of the many silver thiosulphate solutions available in the market.

Proper treatment with STS can add days of extra-lasting life to cut flowers. Follow the supplier's directions.

If you know they have previously been treated in STS solution, within the past 48 hours do not retreat the blooms!

Once rehydrated, the blooms should then go into a preservative solution. This is an absolute necessity during the winter months in order to maximize the lasting life of the blooms.

Since they have come from plants grown under low light levels and thus have a minimum carbohydrate content, their natural shelf life is going to be unduly short. By using a floral preservative you can substantially increase the lasting life of those cut flowers.

Use warm, 100-110°F clean water to prepare the preservative solution. Hopefully you are in an area where the water has a low alkalinity, is not fluoridated or artificially softened.

Water with an alkalinity reading above 200 parts per million, fluoride levels greater than 0.25 parts per million, and sodium ion softened water all significantly reduce the effective shelf life of cut flowers.

Last but not least is the admonition to be sure your stock pots and other floral containers are "squeaky" clean. Microorganisms don't multiply as rapidly in cool weather as they do in summer, but they can still materially shorten cut flower life.

Attention to a few small details can maximize consumer satisfaction. By doing so you can make this a most prosperous new year!

Fresh flowers that provide variety and selection throughout the year.

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