

Anger 94

Fixing the Water: STABY The Use of Floral Preservatives

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Most of us grow some mighty good roses, but we are always on the lookout for how to grow better ones. We read articles about "How to Grow 'Em" and "How to Show 'Em." we listen and learn, and we practice, practice, practice. Then we read in the catalogs about some new variety that is supposed to be "better than sliced bread." We rush off to make our phone order, get our check in the mail and finally plant it with all the gentleness we would give a newborn baby. We try hard, with proper planting, soil additives, regular spraying and even a prayer now and then ... only to find that "sliced bread" was better. After a year or so, we often find that we are pruning the new ones with a shovel.

What often separates the grower from the successful exhibitor or arranger are those acts (often claimed to be just short of sorcery by some old-timers) that are performed on the cut rose, or on the water itself, that sustain the bloom from the time it is cut from the plant until it gets to the show table. It should be noted that the interval the roses are on the show table awaiting judging is very short, compared to the period they are in storage, under refrigeration, or being transported. It is imperative that the cut blooms be treated properly and with authority during these phases to assure that they arrive on the show table "in the most perfect stage of possible beauty."

It's The Water

Because most of the water we use is not pure, and hence may be detrimental to cut blooms, it is up to us to help the process. If you live in a city and obtain water from a treatment plant, it has probably had such chemicals as chlorine, fluorine, soda ash and maybe a multitude of other things added to it. If we live in a rural area, it is not too far-fetched to acknowledge that the water may be high in iron, lime or some combination which does not contribute to the sustained life of the cut blooms.

Wherever you live or whatever your water source, I recommend that your first step in the bloom-preserving process should be using distilled water.

Lacking any other additives, a person cannot go wrong using distilled, totally pure, water. I would not recommend using other types of bottled water, since tests have found many of these to be nothing more than tap water. I have had my best success in both horticultural exhibiting and arranging using distilled water. Recently, I read an article by a well-known florist/designer who maligned the use of distilled water. He said he saw no reason to use anything other than tap water and also saw no purpose in using additives. I have seen this gentleman's work and it is my humble opinion that it shows a lack of attention to detail. My feeling is that our serious ARS exhibitors, whether in horticulture or arranging, are more meticulous than this and realize that only the best entries will win in rose shows.

In addition to using distilled water, there are a number of products on the market today which can be broadly categorized as floral additives, things to "fix the water." These can be grouped into three categories: conditioners, preservatives and stimulants.

Conditioners

Conditioners are concoctions which make the capillaries of the rose stem, as well as its petals and leaves,

turgid, thus giving the bloom superior substance. Since conditioners contain enough chemical to restrict the growth of bacteria in and around the cut stem, the stem can continue to take up water. My favorite among the conditioning products is *Chrysal RVB*. It works very well and is not expensive; one quart of concentrated material will cost about \$25 and will make approximately 130 gallons of solution.

The only other conditioner I have used successfully is *Hydrator Quick Dip*, a product that is best reserved for the daring soul. I say this because the directions call for the very end of the cut stem to be dipped in the solution for *one second* only, after which it is placed into a container with a preservative solution. When I have used it, I've poured a small amount into a bottle cap and then dipped the stems into that, so there's no chance of immersing them too deeply. This product is used primarily by florists when their stock shows wilting and they want to give it a quick pick-me-up for sale.

A commonly found material which also will work as a conditioner is alum. I must confess that I have not used this material because I am so pleased with the results of using *Chrysal RVB*. When mixing and using conditioners, or any other of the floral additives for that matter, only clean plastic buckets, never metal, should be used. These should be thoroughly cleaned between usages.

Russ Anger is immediate past Chairman of the ARS Arrangements Judging Committee, Illinois-Indiana District Chairman of Arrangement Judges, Vice-Director of the Illinois-Indiana District and has been awarded that District's Silver Honor Medal. An exhibitor in both horticulture and arrangements, he has amassed over 200 ARS medal certificates, approximately half in each area.



Preservatives

Preservatives are those compounds designed to provide nourishment for the plant. Common ingredients that you can combine into home-made preservative solutions would include glucose to feed the stems and blooms and bleach to act as an anti-bacterial agent. Commercially available preservatives include:

Floralife — Made in the U.S., this is available at florists and floral suppliers. It comes in small packets which will make a gallon of solution, but is also obtainable (and more affordable) in 1-gallon pails.

Chrysal — Not to be confused with the conditioner, Chrysal RVB, this is made in the Netherlands but is becoming more and more available at floral supply houses here in the States.

Crowning Glory — This is a product that is in vogue with arrangers. It is mixed with water and then spritzed over the completed arrangement, acting like an antitranspirant to prevent moisture and substance loss. Commercial florists use it as a matter of course to preserve their work. However, it is not recommended for exhibitors entering blooms in the horticulture classes, since this material constitutes a prohibited foreign substance.

Some preservatives include:

Everfresh — This is made in England and is reputedly an excellent product. It is, to my knowledge, not yet available in the States, but if you are traveling to Britain or have a "source" there, you might want to try it.

Kristite — This is a product I purchased in Denmark. It too is excellent and is another that I do not believe is available in the States. I used up my supply and have been unable to obtain any more, so if any of you happen to be traveling to Copenhagen ...

There are also a number of homemade preservatives you can try, many of which involve the use of citric acid in one form or another. Some possibilities:

Listerine — Widely available, it should be diluted at the rate of 1 tablespoon to 1 quart of water. It is better to use original formula rather than the flavored kind.

Soda Pop — Some people use Seven-Up as a preservative, some use

Sprite, and I have even heard that some have had considerable success with Diet Mountain Dew. Personally, I have avoided the use of sodas, since I have observed that the entries of those who do frequently have houseflies, something the judges do not consider attractive at all. Further, I do not recommend the use of aspirin; laboratory tests have found this compound to have no value as a preservative.

Stimulants

Stimulants are generally used to give plant material a quick boost, often as a short-term adjunct to the longer-acting preservatives. Stimulants have been subject to a great deal of comment, both pro and con, and are primarily a tool used by arrangers. However, they may also be of value to the horticultural exhibitor who wants to take the trouble. Common stimulants include:

Salt — A solution is made from ½ cup of water and 2 tablespoons of salt. The floral stems are placed in this solution for 1½ minutes, then immersed in fresh water for at least an hour and a half.

Gin/medicinal alcohol — Dry the cut edge of the stem with a cloth or tissue, then dip it into the alcohol for a short time. For arrangers, this treatment is recommended for maple branches, poppies, mimosa, thistles, caladium and gerbera.

Vinegar — A few minutes in vinegar will help some plants stay fresher longer. This is particularly

effective for reeds, grasses, bamboo and miscanthus.

Pepperoni — Grasses react well to having their cut edges rubbed with the spicy juice of pepperoni.

Having discussed a variety of floral additives, let me conclude with a few notes on *when* to use the various products. The initial, or "cutting," water that you use can well be warm/hot tap water without any additives. The purpose of this water is merely to keep the cut stem open and free from the entry of any air.

Once the all-important underwater cut is made on the stem, the bloom is moved to the conditioner water. Many arrangers and exhibitors, including myself, will store the blooms overnight and transport them in the conditioner water. When the blooms are arranged, exhibited or merely placed in a vase in the house, they may be moved to the preservative water. As previously stated, the stimulants may be used at whatever point they are deemed necessary, but usually just before arranging or exhibiting.

Whatever your goals with roses, be they horticultural, exhibiting, arranging or simply making your cut flowers last in the house as long as possible in top condition, there are a number of materials and products to assist you, some of which are quite inexpensive. With a little preparation and care, you too can fix the water and perform those miraculous feats of sorcery on your cut flowers.



Sources and Manufacturers of Floral Additives

Chrysal RVB
Chrysal

Manufactured by:

Pokon & Chrysal,
Naarden, Holland

Distributed by:

Reese Enterprises
352 Leeward Ct.
Oceanside, CA 92054
(619) 757-5905

Hydraflor Quick Dip
Floralife

Made & Distributed by:

Floralife, Inc.
120 Tower Drive
Burr Ridge, IL 60521

Crowning Glory

Made & Distributed by:

The John Henry Co.
5800 W. Grand River
Lansing, MI 48901
(517) 323-9000