

Keep Your Cool

By Mary Westbrook

WHEN IT COMES TO TECHNOLOGY, THERE ARE things florists swear by and things they can't stand. But there's one piece of equipment that's virtually required: A cooler. The good news is that properly maintained coolers can last for a very long time, says Allan Jett, a sales support executive at SRC Refrigeration in Sterling Heights, Mich.

"The cabinet itself should be able to last infinitely if properly maintained," he says. "The motors that go into them generally last about 10 years, but they can be replaced very easily."

Mr. (or Ms.) Clean

So, how exactly do you "properly maintain" your cooler? Always follow the manufacturer's guidelines for one thing, and, for another, implement consistent cleaning schedules. Once a year, for example, it's a good idea to "**deep clean**" your cooler, Jett says. "Shut it down and give it a really thorough cleaning with a weak solution of bleach water." Doing so will keep the unit clean and benefit flowers by preventing the formation of mold.

Another yearly task? **Clean rubber gaskets and door seals.** As you do that, examine the equipment closely. If you spot tears — a common problem — consider a repair. "If your door seals are leaking, the equipment is probably working harder than it needs to be," Jett says.

Also, get in the habit of **cleaning your compressor** once a

month, Jett says. A vacuum will effectively remove dust buildup. "If you don't do that, over time, the compressor is forced to work harder, and that will cut down the lifetime of the equipment," he says.

Remember, you're the best judge of your maintenance needs. "High-use, visible machines need more cleaning," Jett says. "It comes down to the use of the machine, the location of the equipment and the store."

Problem? Don't Panic

Even with proper maintenance, problems occasionally pop up. The most common issues involve **motor problems** (a fan motor dies) or **temperature control issues**. "Most problems are electrical in nature, stemming from low voltage or power spikes," Jett says. "Fan and compression motors are adversely affected by these electrical events."

Because technicians have access to tools and resources florists don't, Jett doesn't recommend taking on repairs yourself. Instead, call in a trained professional. If you don't already know someone in your area, ask for referrals from other businesses. "People in the restaurant industry rely on their refrigerators, and they're a great resource for that kind of recommendation," Jett says.

When you buy a new cooler, be sure to review the company's **warranty policy**, which is often broken down by components (five-year extended warranty on the compressor motor; 10 years on the cabinet; one-year labor, etc.). Think twice about spending money on additional coverage, Jett says: "Usually in the refrigeration sense, if there are problems, they crop up quickly so the basic warranty suffices."

Trading Up

Despite their long life spans, at some point, coolers do need to be replaced. Telltale signs of a past-its-prime unit include unsightly or badly dinged cabinets, degraded installation and cooling problems. In these scenarios, repairs are possible but costly, Jett says. It may make more sense to simply reinvest in a new machine — which isn't a bad thing.

"Lots of our new equipment has lighting now so the cabinets are much brighter, allowing people to really see the flowers," Jett says. "For people who haven't invested recently in a cooler, I think that's the change that will jump out at them. The newer equipment has thinner walls, too, because the installation is thinner." 🌿

Anatomy of a Cooler

What are the most important components of a cooler? Here's a cheat sheet to help you decipher key elements:

The **condensing unit** is composed of the compressor and fan unit. On most coolers, it's found on the bottom of the equipment. It's important to keep the unit clean.

The **evaporator coil** has a fan motor in it that runs continuously and cooling coils. Clean the coils periodically. If the fan motor stops, call for service.

All coolers have some sort of **temperature management system**. Normally, the system does not need to be adjusted. If you notice inconsistencies, call a technician. Well-meaning do-it-yourself florists often do more harm than good.

— M. W.

Mary Westbrook is a contributing editor to Floral Management.
E-mail: mwestbrook@safnow.org