

WHICH ROSES RISE TO THE TOP OF THE CLASS?

> Quick, grab a No. 2 pencil, it's test time. Would you rather your roses die much sooner than expected in your shop, or at a customer's house? Do you want your Valentine's Day roses to still be thriving several days after the conversation hearts are on the clearance rack at the drug store?

Now, put down your pencil and pick your lab coat (or apron), we're going to turn your flower shop into a flower lab, so you can test your varieties before customers get a chance to grade them.

Why test? Roses, like high school students, respond to tests differently. Some, no matter how much grooming and prepping, were born with a genetic composition that makes them prone to short vase lives and diminished quality.

Nobody can just look at a rose and predict its vase life. We've tested more than 60 Colombian and Ecuadorian cut rose varieties and found vase lives ranging from three days to three weeks, with most falling in the seven- to 14-day life span. The best way to know for sure is to test the varieties that interest you.

So, with Cupid warming up his arrow, we're arming you with tips to conduct your own evaluations modeled on ours in the lab.

Come Prepared

Always use clean, sterilized buckets, cutters, vases and sanitized work areas. Make fresh hydration and flower-food solutions. This keeps external sources of bacteria from contaminating the flowers and solutions and robbing vase life. Get your flowers into your test lab within 24 hours of their arrival. If they must be stored until processing, put the flowers in the cooler at 32 to 35 degrees.

Follow these steps for testing varieties:

- 1 Remove flowers from sleeves and randomly select flowers from several bunches, for a total of at least 20 to 24 stems of each variety.
- 2 Remove bottom foliage so none will be submerged in the solution.
- 3 Cut stems, preferably dry. Because of rapid bacteria

growth in cutting tanks, we don't promote underwater cutting unless the water is clean and changed frequently.

- 4 Hydrate roses using a freshly made commercial hydration solution, according to directions.
- 5 Re-cut the stems and place flowers in a freshly made commercial flower food. Our recent tests show that flower food designed specifically for roses is better than flower foods designed for multiple floral species. However, any food is better than just plain water. (Need proof? Compare flowers in a food solution to flowers in plain water.)
- 6 Place flowers in an area that would be similar to a home or office environment, with a temperature between 70 to 75 degrees, under lighted conditions for 10 to 12 hours daily (even if you have to take them home). Keep the vases away from drafts and heat sources. Just as your customer would do, add plain water when the vase solution gets too low, and use the flower food packet.
- 7 Examine the flowers daily. Do your roses open? Flowers will usually reach their opening potential within five to seven days. Pick a day in that time frame to record the stage of opening. This can be a somewhat subjective quality to evaluate as some consumers are satisfied when the petals just start to expand, while others enjoy a fully open flower. Ours pass when the flowers are at least halfway open. Also, note the leaf quality. Yellowing leaves are a major detractor when assessing overall quality.
- 8 Record the date when they are no longer acceptable for consumer satisfaction. This could be due to petal and leaf wilting, browning or discoloration and bent neck. When all the flowers have died, calculate the average days the flowers lived.



TEST CASE SCENARIO Before Cupid turns your shop into a hot spot, turn it into a lab to test which varieties will have customers swooning for you.

Test, and Re-Test

This should give you a good idea of how a particular variety performs, this one time. It's not unusual in our tests for a variety from one shipment to last 14 days, only to be followed by another where the same variety dies in a week. Many variables can explain this inconsistency, so you must repeat the test.

If unsatisfied with a variety's performance, but love the color or shape, shop around. Trying another grower can help you pinpoint if it's the variety or the source. But don't forget, you could be to blame as well. Insist that you set a good example and that all employees follow proper handling procedures.

Score with Customers

As you gain confidence in identifying varieties, consider offering a five- to seven-day guarantee, just like some Internet or mass-market retailers do. Consistent testing affords you the confidence to do this and speak from a place of product knowledge when educating your customers. Now is the time to do your homework and prepare for the ultimate test: consumer satisfaction. 🌹

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