

Care and Handling

FALL FOR THE SEASON'S BEST

> Fall is the time for rich, saturated colors and, fortunately, there are a host of wonderful cuts available to showcase them. The following are just a few of the standards and new species you will want to try.

Physiocarpus For many designers, this U.S. native has become the “must use” fall foliage. The best cultivars are those with deep purple, burgundy, bronze or chartreuse foliage. Of the cultivars we tested, most lasted 12 days and, many, much longer. For maximum longevity, recut stems and place in a holding solution upon arrival.

Seven-son flower A quirky cut, seven-son flower (*Heptacodium miconiodes*) is grown for its dark rosy-red sepals formed in late summer and fall. Use it with or without foliage as a unique filler. Stems will last 10 days or more, and they are not fussy about the solution you used. Stems stored longer than one to two weeks will start to shatter.



AUTUMN GLORY A fall arrangement at the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers conference features *Physiocarpus*, dahlia and antique hydrangea.

Willow Most people think of contorted or pussy willows (*Salix*) for spring, but for fall you should try ‘Flame’ willow with its yellow to orange-red stems. Growers remove the leaves manually for late summer and early fall sales; stems naturally defoliate later in the fall. Easy to handle in the shop, willow can be stored dry or in plain water.

Eupatorium Never heard of *eupatorium*? Don't worry, most folks haven't. Most members of this broad group of perennials flower in the fall and make perfect filler flowers. Your options are many, ranging from burgundy foliage and white flowers to true blue, pink and silvery lavender flowers. Vase life is usually seven to 10 days, but some cultivars will last much longer.

Ornamental pepper If you haven't tried ornamental peppers (*Capsicum*) in a while, check them out. Newer cultivars have fruit shapes ranging from long thin pencils to round marbles in red, orange, yellow, purple and even black. Vase life is typically two weeks or more, especially if put in a holding preservative. Just be sure to remove the foliage, if the grower didn't already. The leaves will turn yellow long before the fruit start to decline.

Hydrangeas The large white, pink and blue hydrangea flowers of spring and summer grow more muted as the flower ages, and green tones reappear, resulting in antique hydrangeas. Unlike many species, vase life improves as these flowers age and antique hydrangeas can last two weeks or longer. Antique hydrangeas require no special handling; simply place stems in water.

Dahlia. With their gorgeous colors and lush profusion of petals, dahlias are the queen of fall arrangements. Postharvest can be an issue with dahlias, however, as vase life is usually only six to seven days. For the best vase life, buy flowers that are not fully open yet and treat with a holding solution. They will finish opening in the arrangement. Properly harvested and handled flowers can last up to 10 days. 🌿

Alicain S. Carlson is a graduate research assistant and **John Dole, Ph.D.**, is a professor and interim department head of horticultural science at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, N.C.
ascarlso@ncsu.edu
john_dole@ncsu.edu



PHYSIOCARPUS OPULIFOLIUS 'DIABOLO'



SEVEN-SON FLOWER



PEPPER 'ON TOP ROUND RED'



EUPATORIUM 'PHANTOM'



WILLOW 'FLAME'