

HOW TO TREAT CUT FLOWERS: MORE EVIDENCE ON POSTHARVEST

Reprinted from Growing for Market, Volume 3, Number 6

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Dr. Leonard Perry, Extension Ornamental Horticulturist at the University of Vermont, recently sent us the results of some trials he has conducted on various postharvest treatments of cut flowers. His work suggests that every flower is different, and that no one preservative or post harvest treatment will be best for every variety. Your job is to come up with the treatment that does the greatest good for the greatest number of your species.

Dr. Perry trialed several brand-name preservatives and came up with different responses from different varieties. Rogard, Floralife and Oasis all performed well in his trails. Rogard added three days over other preservatives for Phlox, three to six days for Solidago (the results with Chrysal were the same) and was among the best treatments for Solidaster, Rudbeckia, Asters 'Climax' and 'Schone von Dietlikon'. Also, he found no difference with or without the RS activator.

When he compared Oasis and Floralife, Oasis was the best preservative for seven species, adding two to ten days vase life. These species were Achillea 'Coronation Gold', A. 'Hoffnung' and A. 'Red Beauty'; Gomphrena mix; Hyssopus officinalis; Liatris 'Picador' and Veronica 'Blue Giant'. Floralife was better for Amethystea caerulea, Aster, Rudbeckia 'Goldsturm' and Solidago. He got the same results from both Oasis and Floralife on these varieties; Achillea 'Cerise Queen', Coreopsis 'Goldfink', Emilia javanica and Phlox paniculata.

Perry also considered whether preservative should be periodically replaced during the vase life of the flowers, and concluded that it wasn't a bad idea. By replacing the solution after three or four days, he added two days of life to the flowers.

However, he found little support for the old notion that you should recut stems, and do it under water (a real pain). Solidaster, Rudbeckia and Aster showed no difference in vase life when stems were cut under water and an insignificant increase in vase life from recutting.

Perry also found that water worked as well or even better than preservative for these species: Amethystea caerulea, Aster, Coreopsis 'Goldfink', Rudbeckia 'Goldsturm' and Veronica 'Blue Giant'. He also experimented with distilled water versus tap water and found very little difference in the vase life of eight species. The source of the tap water, interestingly enough, made quite a bit of difference for some of the species. Vase life varied by up to five days for Aster 'Schone von Dietlikon' when kept in water from six different places across the United States.

The moral to these reports, it seems to me, is "Play around". There are plenty of variables out there, including your tap water. You may find out you don't need preservative at all - but then you have to wonder what your tap water is doing to you!

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