

STABY

Connections

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Ben Romney

Opinions in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the florist and grower.

decade and a half to bring the growers and wholesalers of San Diego County together under one roof. Some folks who used to grow in the area are now bringing product in from Baja California, and there are large importers from Hawaii and South America represented there. A trucking company is on the premises to expedite the transportation of the products throughout the western US. This facility is filled to the brim, and opens its doors, wholesale only, from six in the morning until one in the afternoon. It is a relaxed version of the LA Market, which opens in an all-night frenzy, serving the wholesale community until 8 a.m., then allowing more public access from 8 until Noon. During the last few years, in both places, the flower auctions have closed. Now one has to wander about, looking for the material, rather than having it paraded in front of a group of buyers.

There are great retailers in the area, too. A visit to San Diego is not complete without a stop en route at the marvelous store "Adelaide's" in La Jolla. The store owners admit that they live in paradise. They have discovered the secret of successfully creating a niche in the world, perfecting their product, and polishing their perfection. This shop is a model of the industry. No detail is left to chance. Prices are fair. Customers are happy. Quality is absolute. There is an intensity of focus that is rarely found in a group of employees. Gina Phillips is the current owner. Her father is still very much about the place. I had a pleasant visit with him, hearing him tell of the early years, and how much he enjoys the people of the area they serve. Gina has the magic touch, and continues in the tradition and success of her family. It is a strong family business, with an excellent team of designers and workers. You must stop in for a visit sometime when you're in the area.

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ASK ARDITH

Question: Why do I need to be concerned about cutting my flowers off under water? What are the benefits?

The knowledge of care and handling procedures of cut flowers will help you in keeping and enjoying them longer. The essential steps will be discussed, beginning with the recutting of stems.

Recutting stems

Recutting stems in fresh water and flower food solution maximizes water uptake by removing blockage caused by air, bacteria, and debris. Vital water and nutrients are carried through the stem, leaves and up to the flower through a plumbing-like network of tiny vessels. These vessels can be likened to drinking straws; therefore, a stem is reminiscent of a handful of drinking straws. These straws or vessels are so small that they can easily become blocked or clogged, usually because of air bubbles or the growth of microorganisms. This blockage cuts off or seriously reduces the life-giving supply of water and nutrients. This may cause the flower to wilt or even to die when placed in water. Since stem blockage usually occurs 1/2 to 1 inch of the stem, recutting can remove the potential blockage factors, helping to make the stems more efficient at taking up food and water. Recutting is so effective; in fact, that one study showed that the flower vase life could be extended 15 to 40 percent just by recutting stems (extension can be 20 to 45 percent with underwater cutting in clean water).

Common myths regarding recutting stems are that stems must be mashed, shredded, or split and that they must be cut with a knife. Actually, none of these techniques is particularly beneficial to flower life. The angle cut, which supposedly opens more surface area to water uptake, actually does not open up more individual vessels ("straws") to uptake. Cutting at an angle does not keep flower from adhering to the bottom of the container, and mashing, shredding or splitting can actually do more harm than good. What is important and beneficial is the simple act of recutting stems using a sharp tool made for cutting flower stems.

or ribbon-cutting scissors. (Note: It helps to have specific tools for each job such as a tool for cutting stems or a tool for cutting ribbon only.)

Regular Recutting

First, make sure that stem ends are even. Then hold the bunch securely with one hand and cut 1/2 to 1 inch off the stems with the other hand. Transfer them immediately to solution with flower food.

Underwater Recutting

Japanese floral artists have known the advantages of and have practiced underwater cutting for hundreds of years. To explain the concept, it helps to think of the internal stem structure once again. As long as the "drinking straws" are in water (or on the plant), water can be drawn up through them. Once the stem is cut off or removed from water, however, the demand for water is still continuous. Therefore, as the "straws" continue to suck or draw in, and as water is withdrawn, air enters the stem. Once air enters, the stem will not draw water back up again to its full potential, even when placed back into solution. Recutting underwater in clean water helps prevent air blockage better than regular recutting because the stems initially suck in or take up water rather than air when the cut is made. This helps return the vessels or "straws" to full uptake potential. Underwater cutting is especially beneficial.

1. Make sure the flower and foliage ends are even.
2. Hold the flowers so that the lowest several inches of the stem are underwater, and cut 1/2 to 1 inch off the stems with a sharp knife or oriental shears. Hold under the water for a moment.
3. Transfer the stems to a container of flower food solution. A water droplet will form on the cut ends and prevent air from entering the stems while transferring the flowers.

Stems should be transferred immediately to a flower food solution after being recut. Recut every two or three days. Do not hold flower stems under running tap water in an attempt to perform underwater cutting; do not allow freshly cut stems to lie out of water. Do not mash, shred or split stems, and do not use a serrated knife or regular scissors to cut stems.

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Beveridge 2003

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It was sad to see a vast range of greenhouses along the interstate in Encinitas that were abandoned, now crumbling in ruin. The cost of real estate has risen to a ridiculous level, and the less expensive ground south of the border has proven a quick fix, so many former production areas are giving way to the house seeds that are sprouting along the coast. It is hard to fault someone for wanting to live there. The Ecke family knew the treasure they had discovered long ago. Thanks to their dedication and effort, there are parcels of ground that will remain in production, just for the purpose of preserving and educating people about the importance of the floral industry. The Ecke Poinsettia Ranch is a spectacular place to visit in the autumn. The poinsettias are in peak production and bloom, prepared for their journey to the marketplace. The rainbow and intensity of colors is beyond adequate description.

Nearby, there is a wonderful "Quail

uptake by removing blockage caused by air, bacteria, and debris. Vital water and nutrients are carried through the stem, leaves and up to the flower through a plumbing-like network of tiny vessels. These vessels can be likened to drinking straws; therefore, a stem is reminiscent of a handful of drinking straws. These straws or vessels are so small that they can easily become blocked or clogged, usually because of air bubbles or the growth of microorganisms. This blockage cuts off or seriously reduces the life-giving supply of water and nutrients. This may cause the flower to wilt or even to die when placed in water. Since stem blockage usually occurs 1/2 to 1 inch of the stem, recutting can remove the potential blockage factors, helping to make the stems more efficient at taking up food and water. Recutting is so effective; in fact, that one study showed that the flower vase life could be extended 15 to 40 percent just by recutting stems (extension can be 20 to 45 percent with underwater cutting in clean water).

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One of the most important tools in recutting is a sharp floral tool. It is best to use a sharp knife or oriental sheers. Avoid using dull and dirty knives, wire cutters,

Protea family. There are numerous Protea and Banksia plants, as well as other more tropical trees and shrubs throughout the garden. If you ever wondered how "Safari Sunset" grows, or many of the other popular Leucodendrons, Leptospermums, and Leucospermums, you can see them there. Up the coast there are several famous gardens to visit. The LA Botanical Gardens, the Huntington Gardens, and one unusual collection that I found at the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo campus were all well worth the effort to stop by. Years ago I wandered the foothills above Rancho Santa Fe and visited the Zorro Protea Farm, a collection of every protea imaginable. It has since been sold for real

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where many of the Zorro serials were filmed.

I have spent weeks, cumulatively, visiting growers and retailers in the southern California market. There are yet so many more intriguing things to see. I picture in my mind the images of past visits, especially when the mercury dips so low here, and for a few minutes I am transformed to a warm place. The real compensation comes on a frosty morn when the fog has frozen magically on every object. The twigs are fuzzy white, somewhat like pretzels dipped in yogurt or white chocolate, then dusted with powdered sugar. The ice crystals sparkle in the sunshine, like Tinkerbelle dust falling from the sky. It may not be "never-