

Beauty Tips for Belles and Beasts

By Gay Smith

IN THE FLORAL INDUSTRY, WE SEE IT ALL — FROM the most beautiful tulip blooms to the nastiest goo oozing out of slime-covered stems. The goal? Minimize the goo and slime (or learn how to deal with it). Here are a few care-and-handling questions and answers about some of the industry's take-your-breath-away beauties and some of those hold-your-nose annoyances.

I love buying tulips year-round, but when I get them outside of the “traditional” season, they lack a certain “oomph”.

What gives?

Year-round tulip production involves manipulating the blooming period (the traditional tulip season is from January to April). The technique utilizes different temperature treatments to trick bulbs into thinking they have gone through their winter-freeze period and are ready to bloom. What's the trade-off? Usually, growers use a larger bulb to produce “ice tulips,” and the flowers, although beautiful, may lack some of the vigor of their spring sisters. That's why it's important to use specially formulated food for bulb flowers when processing the off-season tulips.

Bulb flower foods come in display and consumer-vase solutions. Bulb T-bags — pre-measured doses in a bag that you drop into the bucket — are best for sales display. Tulips don't benefit much from sugar, but they do need pollution-free water to maintain flow into their stems.

Most bulb flowers suffer longevity problems because their plant growth regulators (PGR), or hormones, get out of balance at harvest. Rebalancing the PGRs is a matter of letting flowers hydrate in a hormone-based solution, which the ones specially formulated for bulbs contain. Once you restore the chemical balance in the stems, foliage quality and vase longevity will improve. (No more yellow sepals on Stars of Bethlehem, and you'll get more florets to open on double white freesia stems.) Remember, hormones also are needed once the flowers have gone home with the consumer. Give customers a consumer hormone-based sachet, like Chrysal's consumer sachets for bulb flowers (available from Chrysal and Floralife).

Is there a way to stop daffodils from killing other flowers in a design?

Daffodils and hyacinths are bad-boy bulb flowers! Normally, you cannot mix them with other flowers because their mucilage (slime) kills other blooms. Try this, however, and you'll notice a different result: Cut daffodil stems and let them harden in a solution of cold water and a slow-release chlorine pill, such as Professional Gerbera pills from Chrysal or PAL from Floralife. One pill per three quarts water will keep the slime from wreaking havoc on other blooms.

Photo courtesy of Brand Flowers



WELL BALANCED BULBS Proper care can help remedy the hormonal imbalances that occur in many bulb flowers after they're harvested.

Hyacinth flowers are fragrant, but they foul the vase water fast. Unlike almost every other flower, you should not cut the white heel tissue from the stems of hyacinths before placing them in a chlorine solution.

What is the goo coming off of *Tweedia*? How do I get rid of it?

Tweedia gives a milky sap when cut. Treat it like you treat cut poinsettias or Snow on the Mountain: Process flowers in water containing a slow-release chlorine pill. The pill keeps pollution in check, helping water to flow unimpeded into stems. *Tweedia* is ethylene-sensitive, too, so confirm with your supplier that the stems are STS-treated post-harvest.

How do I keep *Gomphrena* and *Heleborous* upright?

These garden flowers require a big boost to get hydrated. Free-flowing water keeps these beauties upright, and to achieve that, a super-clean solution is important. Even if your wholesaler has pre-treated these cuts, give stems a fresh cut (sharp and clean) and place them in a hydration solution, one without sugar, overnight. If you don't have a hydration product in your shop, the chlorine-pill solution is another good processing choice.

How can I stop ornamental kale from fouling the water?

Cut and process kale in a display solution and add a chlorine pill to the mix to knock out bacteria. Remember, chlorine pills are active for only three to four days. After that, dump the solution and start with a fresh mix. By the way, foliage on kale naturally turns yellow as the “flower” matures. Just remove those lower leaves to keep the stem looking great. Just as in bulb flower processing, the grower can treat kale in a hormone solution to rebalance PGRs to prevent foliage yellowing. 🌿

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