

Bird-of-Paradise: Care Tips for the Florist

1. Always order birds-of-paradise with the foliage on. Even if you wish to strip the foliage later for your designs, the leaves can be used separately by cutting, bending or stapling them in modern shapes.

2. When birds arrive in your shop, cut off about 2 to 3 inches from the bottoms of the stems and remove any paper that may be wrapped around the flowers. Cut the stems (and the foliage) at an angle to facilitate use in your designs.

3. Loosen the flowers in each bunch and begin conditioning as soon as possible.

4. To begin conditioning, place the newly cut stems in deep, warm water (80° to 100°F) mixed with a floral preservative.

5. Prolonged storage and refrigeration are not recommended. Birds are tropical flowers and tend to react negatively to cold. They should be kept in high relative humidity, however (90 to 94 percent).

6. Check the water level daily and replenish with preservative and water as needed.

7. *Strelitzia* stems are quite heavy and may crush floral foam, so you might want to use a base of chicken wire instead.

8. Sometimes the original blooms may fade before you manage to sell the flowers. Instead of discarding the stem, remove or pull back the old blossom and make a ½-inch slit at the rear end of the pod near the stem. Reach in with your thumb and carefully lever out the new blossoms. Hold the pod at the bottom and gently pull up the new blossoms into a fan. This is the way birds should always be sent out in arrangements.

9. To further enhance the appearance of the birds, snip off the brown tip at the end of the pod, cutting a new V-shaped tip.

10. Birds should be used as the central focus or primary flower in an arrangement. Don't bury them with other flowers or cut them too short. Rather, put plenty of space around them—let them "fly."

11. Birds-of-paradise are especially effective in modern designs because of their geometric colors.

12. If you use the blooms outside their pod, as in a corsage, be sure to wipe off all natural juices or nectar from the base of the stem. Otherwise this jelly-like substance will cause an offensive smell. Dust the end of the stem with talcum powder to soak up any excess nectar.

What to Tell Your Customers

1. Despite the fact that *strelitzias* are tropical flowers, they will not thrive as cut blooms if exposed to hot air. Neither will they do well in cold air drafts or direct sunlight. Such treatment lends to excessive water loss and early wilting.

2. Check the water level every day and replenish with a solution of water mixed with

floral preservative as needed. Obtain preservative from your florist and follow the package instructions to apply correctly. If the flowers are in a vase, change the water completely every three days.

3. Birds-of-paradise treated properly in this way should last from approximately seven to as much as ten days.