

## Close the 'Loop in the Hole'

By Gay Smith

WHILE CHATTING WITH A DEAR FRIEND RECENTLY, she caught me off guard with a comment about a "loop in the hole." My friend is Mexican and speaks English beautifully, but occasionally she makes wonderful slips with adages and slang, as in this reference to loopholes. Flower care also is full of potential slips, or, as my friend might say, loops in the hole. I'll attempt to point out — and close — some of those potential gaps.

First, temperature makes a huge difference in longevity — especially once flowers finally arrive in the consumer's home. Ask your suppliers how they manage the cold chain. Valentine's Day flowers should be pre-cooled, rotated, shipped and held between 34°F and 38°F (with the exception of tropicals, which should be rotated, shipped and held between 50°F and 60°F.).

### Do Your Part

What can you do at a store level to improve flower quality? First, buy from trusted suppliers. Avoid the temptation to jump at cheap buys. Secondly, get ready! Bacteria is the No. 1 stem blocker for most flowers (read: shrink), so it makes good business sense to start with clean buckets, tools, cooler floors and work tables. The second biggest problem is Botrytis. These non-specific, air-borne fungi need "free" water to germinate and take off. Prevention requires rigorous attention to sanitation measures. Sanitize tables and tools several times a day using a commercial floral cleaner. Since Botrytis spores need water to germinate, keep blooms dry. Don't forget to watch out for a micro-film of condensation on petals and inside sleeves, which can develop when flowers are moved in and out of coolers, when cold blooms are processed into warm solutions or when boxes are left outside of the cooler.

### Hydration Counts

Temperature controls, sanitation processes and keeping flowers dry to control Botrytis contamination are all important measures, but what about choosing the best solution for re-hydrating flowers? Valentine's Day roses are thirsty! For suc-

### Do the Right Thing

**D**on't slip-up on handling procedures because of holiday madness. Take your time and be accurate:

- Store boxes at 34°F to 38°F. Avoid fluctuating temperatures and subsequent condensation.
- Remove only as many boxes as you can process within 60 minutes.
- Always start with clean buckets and vases.
- Mix flower food with cold water or set up buckets a day ahead and pre-chill.
- Measure when mixing solution.
- Cut stems with a clean, sharp knife or flower cutters. All stems need a fresh cut.
- Let bunches sit out (sleeved) for 30 to 60 minutes.
- Hydrate roses for at least four hours before displaying or designing.
- Remove only foliage and thorns below water level. Remove protective nets.
- Keep blooms dry. Avoid dripping, never spritz.
- Top up with fresh solution, not tap water.
- Don't allow smoking around flowers, and don't store food in flower coolers.
- Don't toss diseased petals on the floor for later sweep-up. They'll contaminate tools or flowers that fall into the "trash."
- Don't cram buckets — bunches need air flow.

— G. S.

cessful processing (re-hydration), there are two good solution choices: let flowers hydrate in a **hydration solution** such as Chrysal Professional #1 or Floralife Hydraflor or treat blooms in a **low-sugar flower food** such as Chrysal Professional #2, Floralife Professional or Aqua Plus.

### Gerberas: Keep them Tall

Sick of gerberas flopping? When gerberas limp over, something (bacteria, most likely) is clogging flow in stems. Try these ideas for success. Start clean, really clean. Sanitary conditions are the most important consideration for success. Sharp tools also are important. Dry-packed gerberas fare best when processed in chlorinated water. Both Chrysal and Floralife offer gerbera pills that are active for three days to four days. Avoid dripping on gerberas. Keep blooms dry to fend off possible Botrytis infection. 🌸

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### Info To Go

#### The Big Pinch

How do growers manage to produce 10 times the normal volume for Valentine's Day? Click on the Info to Go logo on the home page of SAF's member Web site, [www.safnow.org](http://www.safnow.org). Or, get it via SAF's Fast Fax by calling (888) 723-2000 and request document #907.