

## Cutting and Grading Influence Cut Flower Keeping

The stage of opening at which a carnation flower is harvested can limit or lengthen the life of that cut flower. A flower is a living part of a plant that continues to grow and develop after harvest. If cut too young, the flower will not attain its maximum size and it may not open fully. If left on the plant too long, it will be large in size but part of its cut flower life has been exhausted before harvest. The optimum stage for cutting most carnation varieties is slightly on the "tight" side. This may best be described as a stage of opening when the outer petals are expanded but the center of the flower is still tight. The centers of white flowers still have some green color. During late spring, summer and fall, carnations can be cut tighter than in winter. Some varieties can be cut tighter than others.

Some carnation varieties produce numerous bullheaded or partially bullheaded blooms at various periods of the year. These are easily recognized for they open slowly and unevenly. The more serious the malformation, the slower the flowers will open. This malformation is brought about by auxiliary growths or secondary whorls of petals around the ovary of the flower. If enough of these whorls develop, the calyx is filled tightly and the normal petals are partially bound in the calyx.

If only one auxiliary whorl develops, the flower is often slabsided, the petals

on one side being restricted and their development delayed. Most slabsided flowers will develop properly after being cut from the plant, but they should not be left on the plant to open. If they are left on the plant a day or two, they are then cut and bunched with younger flowers and they will have considerably less keeping life.

Bullheads, on the other hand, have little value. During other times of the year bullheads tend to split and develop without delay. If the calyx does not split, the bullheaded carnation develops so slowly that it is next to worthless when sufficiently open for cutting. Most bullheads have less than half the cut flower life of normal flowers.

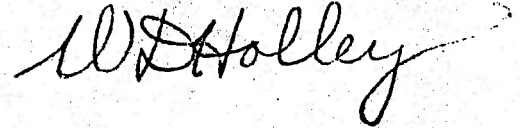
The one who cuts carnations should be familiar with grading. It is wasteful to cut a long stem with a flower head that is hollow or malformed or too small to make the fancy grade. On the other hand, it is wasteful to cut an otherwise fancy flower, with a short stem.

Bullheads and splits can be cut to large side breaks, if present, for stem length is of no consequence to these. Slabsided flowers should be cut when the majority of the flower is in the optimum stage for cutting. If cut in this stage they will keep as long as normal flowers and most of them will develop. Even if bunched separately and sold as an inferior grade, they will give satisfaction.

The grader must be alert to spot these imperfect flowers. A small, hollow centered flower may have been missed by the cutter because it was so small. When he finally cuts the flower it is old. Flowers that are faded, hollow centered,

full blown or bullheaded will not keep as well as normal flowers. If these escape the grader's attention and are bunched with good flowers they will bring legitimate complaints. A bunch of flowers is no better than the poorest flowers in that bunch.

Your editor,



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