

## EXOTICS: BASIC CARE FOR NOT-SO-BASIC FLOWERS

> Exotic flowers are far more costly than every day stems and even tropicals. Don't squander your premium purchase with sub-par care and handling practices. Here's a rundown of the basic principles to keep your exotics in top shape.

### Most flowers are delicate. Avoid mechanical damage with proper unpacking.

Carton design and packaging is critical to flower longevity. Exotics, as a rule, are only available in a few areas of the world, and you might find that the packaging is as exotic as the flowers inside. Ask your wholesaler if there are any special instructions to easily remove the packaging without damaging the flowers. This may be the first time you have purchased from a particular farm, but it is probably not the first time your wholesaler has. They know the tricks from practice.

### Unpack immediately after receipt and hydrate.

Every flower cut and shipped in a box or in water is subject to stress. Make sure you process these flowers immediately at receipt. Don't let the flowers sit in a box or outside the cooler. With clean tools, give the flowers a fresh cut, then place them in a clean bucket with flower food. Ideally, keep the water temperature as close as possible to your cooler's temperature. Checking the water temperature in your cooler's buckets is the most precise way to check proper cooler temperature. Often, air temperature fluctuates with the opening and closing of your cooler door, or the vent in the cooler. To assure consistent temperature, place buckets in various areas of the cooler and test the water in each. This will indicate any temperature inconsistencies in the cooler.

### Flower food intensifies flowers' color development.

Flower food is never more important than with exotic flowers. Their intense, unique colors and textures are what make their impact. Nutrients in flower food promote proper development that brings out these intense colors. The dosage of flower food for an exotic is no different than any other flower. Follow instructions on the flower food package.

When designing, use a flower food solution in floral foam or a vase of water. The benefits of flower food improve flower life in both. Remove foliage that is below the water line to avoid contamination. And finally, use a finishing spray, such as Floralife® Finishing Touch®, to ensure the flowers' freshness before you place them in the cooler or deliver them to your customer.

Sometimes, in the excitement of working with high-end flowers, it is easy to forget the basics. But exotics are even more finicky than your everyday buds. Treat them like a visitor to your home, not like a familiar friend or relative. And just like when you have an overnight guest, ask the wholesaler if there are any special instructions that you should know. For example, some exotics have varying temperature ranges, and you can use special techniques to prevent common problems that affect these flowers. And remember, you can always contact your care and handling experts for added advice. Floralife has resources online by flower type; if you can't find specific information, call directly. 🌸



PHOTO COURTESY OF RENÉ VAN REMS INTERNATIONAL.

**NOURISH BEAUTY** Intense colors and interesting textures give exotics, such as these *Leucospermum* (pincushion proteas), their appeal. Flower food helps these traits develop properly.

FLOWER NAME	SPECIAL TRAITS
Dutch amaryllis (Amaryllis/Hippeastrum)	Bulb flowers coming in orange, red, rose, pink, white, beclouded.
Anthuriums (Anthurium species)	Rigid flowers with a thick and waxy feel and appearance. Their colors range from whites to pinks and reds.
Birds of Paradise (Stelitzia reginae)	Spectacular flower shape, which resembles a bird's beak and head plumage.
Gardenias (Gardenia jasminoides)	Waxy, white and very fragrant, seen either single or double and up to 4 inches in diameter.
Lilacs	Purple color, clustered, beautiful and very fragrant.
Lily of the valley	Bell-shaped flowers that infuse the air with fragrance throughout the day.
Heliconia Pendula (Frosty)	Pinkish red on lower half of the cheek and red on the upper half.
Musas	Inflorescence of Musas is 6 inch crimson red/purple. Musa Bananas of exquisite taste and grandeur.
Calatheas	The most beautiful in the Marantaceae family. Bracts of various shapes.
Gingers	One of the most beautiful and colorful flowers in the world of flowers.
Palms	Individual palm flowers are usually small greenish and insignificant. Borne on simple or branching spikes, very generally protected by a spathe or spathes.
Orchids	One of the most exquisite and fascinating flowers in the world.
Lotus	Beautiful and fragrant opens in the morning and petals fall in the afternoon. White and pink colors in general and they grow in shallow and murky waters

**Jay Winnerman** is director of sales for Smithers-Oasis North America and has done hundreds of presentations and audits for all aspects of the floral industry on improving flower life, reducing dump and increasing customer satisfaction. [jwinnerman@floralife.com](mailto:jwinnerman@floralife.com)