

# Care & Handling

## Flower-Specific Q&A

By W. Kurt Schroeder, AAF, AIFD, PFCI

CERTAIN CARE-AND-HANDLING PROCESSES, SUCH AS temperature management, flower food and sanitation, should be applied to all cultivars. But flowers, like humans, aren't robots. Some cultivars have unique challenges. This month, we'll tackle some questions I've recently received about those challenges.

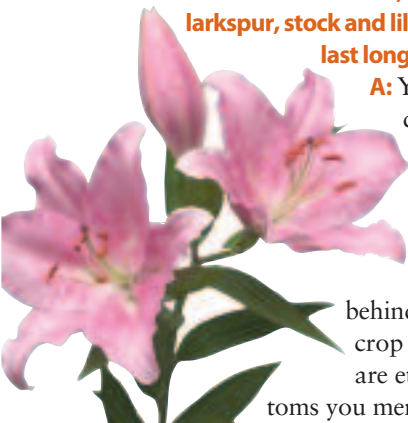
**Q: We sell a lot of cut gladioli in the summer. Should we "tip" them (remove the top few florets) to encourage other florets to open more?**

**A:** "Tipping" has been popular for years for gladioli, but no research supports the practice. Gladioli are geotropic (the flower stalk bends opposite of gravity). Store them

upright to eliminate bending. They do benefit from good care-and-handling practices, including a commercial flower food solution. Since gladioli are corms (like a bulb), use flower foods formulated for bulb crops. (See Info to Go.)

**Q: I manage a supermarket's floral department. I complete the correct processing steps, including cleaning my display buckets after each use, but I still find that delphinium, larkspur, stock and lilies either drop petals or just don't last long. What am I doing wrong?**

**A:** You may be overlooking ethylene damage. Ethylene, an odorless and colorless gas, can, in very small quantities, kill certain varieties in just 24 hours. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, ethylene damage is behind 30 percent of all floriculture crop loss. The flowers you mentioned are ethylene sensitive, and the symptoms you mentioned are classic examples of



ethylene damage. Floral departments in supermarkets are more vulnerable to ethylene sources because of their proximity to fresh fruit and produce, sources of ethylene gas. Other ethylene sources include engine exhaust, cigarette smoke, damaged and old flowers, mold and bacteria.

To help prevent ethylene damage and dramatically improve quality and vase life, make sure your wholesaler or supplier uses an ethylene action inhibitor, proper temperature control (34°F to 38°F) and proper sanitation practices.

**Q: How can I improve the lasting quality of tropical flowers?**

**A:** Treat tropicals like other flowers except for storage temperature. Store them at 55°F at 80 to 90 percent relative humidity. Remember, protea are not tropicals and should be stored at 34°F to 38°F with other flowers.

**Q: We sell a lot of local, field-grown flowers like larkspur, sunflowers, zinnias and dahlias in the summer. Do these need special care?**

**A:** Process them like other fresh-cut flowers. Rinse debris off stems. Use a hydration pre-treatment and commercial flower food solution. Field blooms respire and transpire just like other commercially grown flowers and need the vital ingredients in a commercial flower food to maximize customer satisfaction. Hydration solutions, for example, benefit sunflowers, which can be hard to hydrate and will sometimes appear wilted. Larkspur and some sunflowers also are ethylene sensitive and benefit from an ethylene action inhibitor.

**Q: I've heard many opinions on processing cut lilies. Should I process lilies in plain tap water only?**

**A:** Only if you want to reduce their vase life and starve them! Process cut lilies in a commercial flower food solution. I know of no research that supports processing lilies in plain tap water versus a flower food solution. In fact, some flower foods are specially formulated for bulb crops. 🌱



### Info To Go

#### Care and Handling Resource Guide

Get a summary chart of post-harvest products, the companies that provide them and what you can do with them from SAF's Care and Handling Resource Guide, published in the May 2005 issue of Floral Management magazine. Click on the Info to Go logo on SAF's member Web site, [www.safnow.org](http://www.safnow.org), or get it via Fast Fax by calling (888)723-2000 and requesting document #688.

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