

FUEL FLOWERS FOR MARATHON CELEBRATIONS

> Lush weddings that go on for days and require buckets of blooms require not only a florist who can go the distance but also flowers that won't fade. Weddings in the Indian and Pakistani communities rely heavily on brightly hued, fragrant and texture-rich flowers in almost every aspect of the multi-day affairs. While that's reason for celebration on the balance sheet, it's also cause for some serious attention to care and handling. You can't make a lasting impression (or at least one you want guests to remember) if your flowers don't last.

The blooms on the guest list in traditional Indian and Pakistani weddings include roses, gladiolas, chrysanthemums, zinnias and marigolds. Cut flowers with lush fragrances, such as tuberose and jasmine, are also popular. Roses, gladiolas, tuberose and jasmine are available year-round. Local growers are your go-to for zinnias and marigolds in the summer and fall. (Zinnias and marigolds don't ship well in boxes because the hollow bases under the heads tend to bend.) Zinnias are available in almost any color except for true blue; marigolds supply the bright yellows and oranges requisite in these Technicolor celebrations. Store jasmine, glads and tuberose in the cooler to preserve their quality for long periods.

Keep Zinnias Zippy

Freshly harvested zinnias and marigolds should last a week. For best results, place them in a holding preservative overnight for up to 48 hours. Extensive testing of zinnias has shown that vase life will be affected by the season. In our area (North Carolina), stems last twice as long (up to three weeks), when harvested in mid-summer compared to when they are harvested in the fall. Other areas of the country will also experience a seasonal swing in vase life. Zinnias are especially prone to bacteria; replace bucket water regularly and use only clean buckets and clippers. A sure sign of dirty water will be the messy "melting" of stems in the water. Zinnias are also prone to damage from cold temperatures; avoid storing below 40F. You can use foam with zinnias, but you'll lose a couple days of vase life. Zinnias are not ethylene sensitive.



BABY THESE BOLD BEAUTIES 'Benary Giant Scarlet' (top) is a classic zinnia variety, popular in many Indian weddings, along with 'Narai Yellow' marigold (right). To keep these varieties looking bright, return them to the cooler after each day's events.

Make Marigolds Beam

For marigolds, stems last the longest if they're harvested when 25 to 50 percent of petals are open. However, the heads of fully opened blooms look great for weddings. During wedding celebrations, put garlands back in the cooler overnight to help them last and remain fresh. Marigolds tolerate dry storage in boxes for up to two weeks. Like zinnias, they're not ethylene sensitive. Floral preservatives prolong the flower life up to 10 days. Change the solution every five days to avoid microbial build-up and turbidity caused by breakdown of stem tissues. Interestingly, marigolds also develop roots in water after about two weeks.

With flowers playing such a critical role in the matrimonial marathon of events, you have to keep them in peak condition.

During multi-day events, returning flowers to the cooler overnight will keep them fresh. How long the flowers keep looking good depends on the temperature of the hotel and how much time they spend out of the cooler. Spritzing the garlands and ornamental wreaths will help them last longer. Some florists keep back-up flowers to replace the wilted



ones as an insurance policy. When using fully mature marigold blooms, be aware that they shed a little pollen, which may stain clothes yellow; however, it is not a problem with fresh and young flowers. 🌻

Iftikhar Ahmad, Ph.D., is a post-doc fellow and **John Dole, Ph.D.**, is a professor and interim department head of horticultural science at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, N.C.