

## KEEP HOLIDAY BLOOMS FROM ROASTING

> As temperatures drop, furnaces kick on and fires warm the hearth. The holiday season can be cozy, yes, but indoor heating sucks moisture from the air, wood fires and candle smoke generate ethylene and party-goers toss unwanted drinks into soil of decorative poinsettias — all of which puts pressure on fresh cut blooms, evergreens and potted plants. But with a bit of holiday TLC, cut blooms and potted plants will hold up beautifully through the whirlwind of festivities.

### Potted Plant Protection

The main culprits of premature death for potted plants: dry air, overwatering, rotting and ethylene.

Impossible to smell, see or taste, ethylene causes bud drop, shattering petals, falling leaves, flopping flowers and leathery petal appearance. Ethylene is a stress-response hormone produced from ripening fruits, auto exhaust and smoke; fireplaces, cigarettes — even a burning piece of bread stuck in the toaster produces ethylene, which kills **orchids**, **Christmas cacti**, **hibiscus** and **gloxinias**.

One way to prevent ethylene damage is to keep plants out of rooms with any smoke. Also, avoid using fresh apples (high producers of ethylene) in holiday designs. To be on the safe side with poinsettias, you could buy strictly non-ethylene sensitive varieties, such as **'Winter Rose'**, **'White Pearl'** and **'Jingle'**. If they arrive with broken bracts, treat stems in slow release chlorine water until sap stops flowing and then use in design (without re-cutting).

Furnaces can cause plants (especially orchids) to dehydrate quickly. Tell customers to place potted orchids on pebble-filled saucers and to fill them with bottled water to the bottom of the pot. As water evaporates, the humidity provides moisture in the microclimate around the pot, but because the roots are above the water level, you've pre-



**FEED ME!** Potted plants and fresh cuts need proper nutrition to survive the hectic holiday season.

vented drowning. Remind customers: the fastest way to kill an orchid is to love it to death by overwatering and over-fertilizing. Watering once every seven to 10 days will suffice; fertilize every other month during winter.

### Feed Your Fresh Cuts

**Spray roses** offer a bang for your buck, if you help them "carb load," so the majority of their buds open. The day before you receive product, prepare flower food in clean buckets according to directions. A holding solution, such as Chrysal Professional #2 or Floralife Professional, will lower pH; check pollution and provide some sugar, so petals and leaves become turgid, but blooms don't pop too fast. Chill buckets in your cooler. On arrival, cut an inch from stems and immediately place bunches in the cold solution. Remove inner cardboard wraps, but keep outer sleeves in place to protect against mechanical damage. Most important, leave leaves on! They contain specialized cells that pump solution into buds. Let bunches sit outside cooler for 20 to 30 minutes so moisture evaporates from blooms. Allow ample

time for stems to fully hydrate — at least four hours, though overnight is best.

Using cut **hydrangeas** for holiday glam? Hydrangeas are big drinkers and fare best hydrating overnight. Try Chrysal Rose Pro Hydration as the first drink. After six to 12 hours, fill vases with flower food (which helps florets stand upright), give a fresh cut and transfer stems.

**Hellebores** is another elegant, easy-to-care-for bloom for the holidays. First, purchase mature blooms, which last longer than hellebore flowers that are just opening. A good time to buy is after the pistils and anthers have fallen and nectaries (petaloids) have matured. Treat blooms in a holding solution (same as spray roses) and stems will last 12 to 15 days.

Designing with **proteas**? Channel the sugar plum fairy and prep stems in a full-load vase solution and store at 34 to 38F. These species love sugar, which prevents leaf blackening. 🌿

**Gay Smith** is the technical consulting manager at Chrysal Americas in Miami. [gaysmith@earthlink.net](mailto:gaysmith@earthlink.net)