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Keeping flowers fresh and attractive leads to more sales

STABY

by Lorraine Bergstrand

Demand for fresh cut flowers is on the rise in the United States. Special occasion, high-style "florist" arrangement sales are leveling off. The new demand is for informal, casual bunches, loosely arranged by Ms. Consumer in her own vase or bowl (and for her family). This offers supermarkets a unique opportunity to meet this need if fresh, quality flowers are conveniently displayed and attractively priced.

More and more consumers shop for cut flowers in supermarkets if they find merchandise that has quality.

They want flowers that are fresh, first and foremost. Promoting cut flower sales involves many standard operating procedures already in use for handling produce. Cut flowers demand the same quality control that successful produce managers apply to fruit and vegetable displays.

Today's consumer rarely finds bruised berries, black bananas, or grubby greens in first-rate produce departments. But all too often cut flower displays include product that is shabby at best, with limited shelf life and customer complaints built in

lene levels, both of which increase inside covered boxes. Use plastic containers, large enough to hold bunches without crowding. Keep vases bacteria-free by frequent scrubbing with a solution of bleach and warm water.

Fill containers so one-fourth to one-third of stems are under water. Don't crowd too many into one bucket, or use such a deep container that the flower heads become wet. Use bath temperature water (110 F.) to which floral preservative has been added. Recent studies show that stems cut under water prevent air bubbles from forming in the stems, a frequent cause of premature wilting. Flowers out of water for longer than a minute seal their stems, preventing proper intake of water.

Just grasp the entire bunch of flowers firmly,

Consumers are now more receptive to buying flowers in a supermarket, but only if the quality is as good as or better than retail florists.

hold the stem ends under water, and cut off ¼ inch with a sharp clipper, then plunge them immediately into the warm preservative solution. This procedure can double the life of cut flowers...and reduce spoilage. Water will return to room temperature within an hour, and flowers can then be refrigerated.

Remove all excess foliage from stems that will be under water. This is especially important for daisies and pom-poms. Foliage in water deteriorates rapidly, causing bacteria to form, plugging cells in stems, shortening shelf life.

Transpiration, or the giving off of moisture from petals and leaves, is greatly reduced when cut flowers are kept in cool temperatures. An open refrigerated flower cart or wall merchandiser is ideal for customer selection. Gas emission from fruit can damage cut flowers, so avoid produce coolers for inventory storage. Use dairy or wet coolers instead.

During peak sales periods such as week-ends or holidays cut flowers can be displayed without refrigeration because of fast turn. Display them at eye level in buckets on shelves, stands, or

carts, giving them the appeal of an old-fashioned open-air street market. Flowers left unsold at night can be placed in a cooler for freshening-up.

Replenish cut flower displays often. One or two solitary bunches in a bucket do nothing to encourage fresh flower sales. If inventory levels are low, display flowers together in fewer containers, rather than showing just a few bunches scattered around. Plan for a realistic dumpage. Cut flowers run about 17 percent. If your dump is less you are losing sales!

Check displays frequently to see that all stems are down in the water. Customer handling often pulls bunches out of water. Replenish water levels as it is absorbed.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Buy quality to maintain quality.

ATTENTION!!

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former complaints turn in.

Why is this?

We think many floral managers don't have a system of code-dating, which removes

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the guess-work. Cut flower turn should be three to four days, almost without exception. Flowers are either fresh or they should be dumped. No mark-downs! When cuts enter your store they have already lost from two to four days between harvesting and store delivery. If you store them any longer than four days they simply age beyond the point of customer satisfaction. There's no shelf life left to enjoy, and the customer is disappointed.

Most consumers say they would rather pay more for quality flowers than buy a cheap, marked-down bunch of blooms they soon find out doesn't last long or look as pretty.

Let's take it from the beginning, when product arrives in store.

Cut flowers must have first priority in the unpacking process, before flowering or green plants, because of their perishability. Prompt removal of cuts from packing boxes reduces heat and harmful ethy-

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