

## Moody Blues (And Pinks, Yellows and Reds)

By Gay Smith

I LIKE FLOWERS WITH ATTITUDE. UNFORTUNATELY, many florists treat all flowers alike. Isn't it time to trade the one-size-fits-most mentality for specific care and handling procedures rooted in science, particularly when the blooms are challenging? I'm dedicating this month's column to tips on how to maximize the longevity of "persnickety" flowers.

### Bouvardia

Bouvardia, which is ethylene-sensitive, benefits from a post-harvest treatment of silverthiosulphate (STS). Proper hydration (or rehydration) will prevent wilting. Hydrate stems in an aluminum sulfate-based solution. These solutions often appear milky due to a reaction between calcium and magnesium molecules precipitating out of the solution. Don't worry. It's normal.

Peter Ullrich of Esmeralda Farms in Miami recommends breaking bouvardia stems, rather than cutting them, because bouvardia is sensitive to crushed xylem cells. Either way, use clean tools and hydrate stems for at least four hours (and up to three days) before transferring them into flower food.

### Dahlias

Dahlias are all about beautiful shapes, colors and sizes, but they kill themselves by fouling the water fast. Clean water is your best defense.

U.S. growers hydrate dahlias in aluminum sulfate, chlorine or quaternary ammonium-based solutions to ensure that the first drink is strong. In the United Kingdom, growers treat dahlias with STS at farm level, which won't keep the water clean but will protect the blooms against ethylene damage. Florists should process bunches in a hydration solution based on aluminum sulfate. After one to three days, transfer the flowers into a display flower food solution augmented with a slow-release chlorine pill. (Remember, the stems "bleed" carbohydrates, enzymes and organic matter every time they are cut.)

### Other Finicky Buds

Here are a few more tips for other popular, but tricky, flowers:

**Celosia** fouls water fast, making an anti-microbial agent in the water key to longevity. Look for a slow-release chlorine treatment or use hydration solutions. Because hydration solu-

### Yellow Means Beware

Yellow foliage is a symptom of the hormonal imbalances bulbous crops suffer when harvested from their bulb, rhizome, corm or tuber. It isn't the only symptom: tulips stretch, anemones fade, iris flowers flop, sepals on Stars of Bethlehem turn yellow and tuberose shrivel. Countering this imbalance is a matter of rebalancing the hormones. Test a bulb treatment against your current handling method to compare results. Ask your supplier how he treats his bulb flowers. If you want to make your own tests, request bulb product samples from your wholesaler. —G.S.

tions don't contain sugar, flowers should be kept in these solutions for only three to four days. Otherwise, the blooms starve.

Most of **bupleurum's** issues involve the cut point at the grower level. Look at the yellow flowers at the stems' tips. They're at the right cut stage when almost all of the flowers are open. If cut too tight, tips droop.

After harvest, **lisianthus** should be placed in a low-sugar flower food (1.5 percent), which will acidify the water and keep bacteria in check. To avoid Botrytis damage on petals or collapsed buds, don't cram buckets or display bunches in high-drip locations.

**Tuberose's** sexy scent comes at a cost: The sugar-loving blooms suffer hormonal issues at harvest. To make the stems and fragrance last, fill buckets with a half-gallon of water and toss in a bulb T-bag once the flowers arrive at your shop.

**Hypericum** is sensitive to leaf rust. The plants are especially prone to disease when setting berries. Growers should treat the disease in the field, eliminating diseased stems before shipment. If your hypericum is covered with spots, you can strip the foliage, but it's a time-consuming task that leaves the berry clusters looking naked.

Don't forget: All flowers, especially "sensitive" buds, should drink at least four hours, but preferably overnight, before you use them in vase design or foam arrangements. 🌸

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