Care & Handling

Pop Gerbera Cultures

By Gay Smith

QUICK! NAME THE FLOWER MOST WIDELY recognized by consumers, especially in the last five years. Need hints? It’s used in a variety of colors and has the most popular flower shape recognized by John and Jane Public. If you’ve been on the lookout for trends the floral industry can hang its hat on, no doubt, gerbera daisies come to mind.

Still, gerberas come with frustrations. Everyday, I get questions from consumers about gerberas are sensitive to Botrytis — some varieties more so than others. Often, when designers pull out one stem they inadvertantly drip water on the “eye” of another bloom. Sometimes, stem tissues get scraped as flowers are pulled from cardboard collars. Since the center of a gerbera flower (the disc) is tightly packed, water snuggles in, rather than running off or evaporating. The dense flower centers create a perfect spot for Botrytis spores to germinate. Scraped stems also make perfect wound entry sites for bacteria infection or disease spores. As Botrytis develops, the disease compromises the neck tissues in gerberas and heads rot off.

Cut point is another factor affecting vase performance. Cut too soon and the gerbera stems don’t have sufficient lignecous material in the stem cells, causing heads to droop. The correct cut-point is when two rings of anthers show in the flower disc.

The Basics

Clean buckets and solutions free of bacteria, molds, fungi and organic material or “green bits” are of utmost importance for gerberas.

Solving Solution Requirements

In post-harvest, growers treat gerberas with chlorinated water. Often, household bleach is the chlorine formula of choice. However, while bleach (sodium hypochlorite) is cheap and aggressive, it’s not stable. Ever notice the expiration date on the bottle of bleach? When diluted, it loses its antibacterial effect — a strong smell is not an indication of chemical strength. The “active” antibacterial power of chlorine also is a one-time expenditure. Once chlorine kills microbes, it becomes inactive, meaning flowers going into dirty buckets never receive the benefits of bleach. The antimicrobial action is depleted just fighting existing pollutants.

The popularity of gerberas in mixed bouquets has put pressure on postharvest solution manufacturers to come up with a longer-lasting solution for gerberas. Chrysal and FloraLife have a chlorine-based treatment that is stable and effective for up to three days. The new formulas are easily applied (effervescent pill form), making them suitable for use at every level and at inexpensive prices. Growers and bouquet makers from Europe, California and the United Kingdom have been impressed with improved vase results of gerberas treated with gerbera pills.

GERBERAS GALORE

Ever-Bloom, in Carpinteria, Calif., is the largest gerbera grower in the United States, with more than 240 varieties available.

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