

Reputable Roses

By Kurt Schroeder, AIFD, PFCI

EVEN IF YOU PROMOTE YOUR SHOP, TRAIN your staff and build up your store, if you aren't taking care of your flowers, you're losing market share. Roses are a staple for traditional florists, but the beloved beauties come with a host of care-and-handling issues. I hear these questions most often:

Q: I just got a rose shipment. How do I slow bloom opening? How do I speed it up?

A: Follow typical processing steps (see sidebar), with the following adjustments: To slow opening, use cold or chilled water for the flower-food solution. Immediately after processing, store flowers between 34°F and 38°F. To speed opening, use warm water for your commercial flower-food solution. Leave flowers at room temperature for two hours before using them.

Q: Should I remove roses' thorns?

A: Unless your shop requires it (for aesthetic purposes), don't do it. Unlike fleshy foliage, thorns don't break down and contaminate the flower-food solution. Thorns removed above the solution level may create a site for disease entry. Plus, it costs labor dollars to remove them.

Q: Should I cut roses with a knife or shears?

A: A knife is much faster to use when designing, but sharp, clean, bypass shears are fine. The key is that the tool is clean and sharp.

Q: Do hydration solutions make roses open more quickly than just flower food?

A: Hydration solutions help increase the uptake speed of solution so roses can develop and open over time. There is a misconception that hydration solutions open roses too fast. Temperature control is the key factor in bloom opening. To keep roses from opening too fast, keep them in a cooler at 34°F to 38°F at 80 to 90 percent relative humidity. The two

general types of hydration solutions, instant and long term, can both be beneficial to rose hydration and vase life when followed by a fresh flower-food solution.

A common customer complaint about roses is, "they never opened." Proper care and handling, including commercial hydration solutions, is a key component to eliminating this problem.

Q: Should I wire my roses?

A: The only benefit to wiring roses is that they will die with dignity. Current varieties, when properly handled and processed, don't need a wire. If roses' necks are bending, the problem is in the bottom two inches of the stem, where something is blocking the solution from going up, not in the top of the bloom. Also, any wound increases the production of ethylene gas and can create an entry point for infection. If you must wire a rose, insert the wire into the base of the petals not into the hip (the bulbous green area at the top of the stem).

Q: Can I arrange roses in floral foam?

A: Roses do very well in floral foam if the proper steps are followed. Always free float your foam in a commercial flower-food solution, keep the foam-soaking solution container clean and replenish often with fresh solution. Leave room for the recipient to add more flower-food solution as needed.

Q: What can I do about opening cut flowers for special events, especially 'Casa Blanca' lilies and roses?

A: Order them seven to 10 days earlier than the other flowers. Store them at 65°F to 70°F for three to five days in a commercial flower-food solution. Blowtorches don't work. Extra warm environments cause more harm than good. After the flowers open to about 75 percent of the desired look, refrigerate them until you are ready to design.

Q: Do I need hydration pre-treatments when I use a flower food? Do I only need them for roses?

A: Commercial hydration pre-treatments help ensure flowers' "plumbing" remains free flowing and that flower food moves up the stems. Hydration pre-treatments aren't only for roses, gerberas and other flowers in the "watch-it-wilt group." Use them during processing for all varieties, even cash-and-carry mixed bouquets. Remember, if even one flower in a ready-to-sell bouquet wilts because of a hydration problem, the bouquet is non-saleable. Hydration pre-treatment is an inexpensive insurance policy.

Q: How can I reduce shrink among pre-made rose bunches?

A: Rose varieties open at different rates. Your major tool in keeping roses from opening prior to sale is temperature management. Keep roses in a 34°F to 38°F refrigerator. 🌹

Bone up on the Basics

Follow these basic steps for rose processing:

- Process flowers immediately upon receipt, or store them dry in a 34°F to 38°F cooler and process them later that day.
- Remove wrappers, bands and any packing material.
- Remove foliage that falls below the solution level. Leave the rest of the foliage on the stem.
- Re-cut the stem and utilize a commercial hydration solution.
- Place in chilled flower-food solution and place immediately in the cooler at 34°F to 38°F.
- Wait 24 hours or overnight before selling or using them.

— K. S.

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