

SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS: PREP FLOWERS WITH LESS WASTE

> During this roller coaster ride of financial upheavals, consumers are hyper-sensitive about the value of purchases. When it comes to flowers, value is defined by vase longevity. The vase life matrix includes genetics, variety selection, growing areas and production procedures. Treatments, handling protocols and eco-sensitivity play a part, too. Here are some ways to improve the sustainability of flower prep — green actions that pay back.

Talk Trash to Customers

Separating plastic sleeves from flower green trash is as easy as setting up two trash cans in the work areas. If you do it, talk about it. If you don't, get thee to a hardware store and buy a trash can.

Recycling and reusing packaging materials is something you most likely already do, but what is sustainable about your solution use? Are you cleaning buckets with bleach or using a biodegradable detergent? A floral merchandiser at a big box store says she dilutes the biodegradable floral cleaner concentrate as listed on the label, scrubs buckets, dumps the dirty water, inverts the buckets to dry — and skips the final rinse step to save time and water. She says she's never had problems with flower quality or slimy buckets.

The Remix Master

Reusing hydration solutions conserves both water and labor. A commercial hydration solution, when properly mixed, can be reused. In fact, reuse is recommended; check the label.

Hydration solutions are viable for up to seven days in the cooler when you start with clean buckets and skim out green bits between uses. Develop an easy way to identify hydration buckets in the cooler (color code), and use the same solution to hydrate throughout the week. Because the solution is cold, it flows fast into stems, which is especially helpful for high-volume holidays or when you need to design with blooms the same day as purchase.

Are all solutions suitable for reuse? It depends. Hydration solutions are focused solely on kick-starting the

flow through to restore the water balance, so they don't contain sugar. The lack of sugar and treating in the cooler (34°-38°F) keeps the pollution potential low. Once flowers are fully hydrated, they need to be transferred into a second solution containing some sugar to maximize bud opening. If that solution is a low-sugar display/holding solution and it's used inside the cooler, reuse is perfectly acceptable for up to six days, but if the second solution is a full-sugar formula for vases and containers, start fresh rather than reuse. Rule of thumb: If you are scooping powder into buckets, you are using a full-sugar vase formula.

Filler Up, and Up and Up

Topping up (adding more solution to the vase or bucket) should top your list of sustainable solution practices. Some flowers are big drinkers and can down a bucket or vase dry in a day or two. Instead of removing all bunches and setting up another bucket, just top up the current container with freshly made solution. Prepare a bucket or two of display solution (low-sugar food), put it in the cooler and use it to top up as needed. Use the same method for vases and arrangements, using a needle-nose watering can with vase solution (full-sugar flower food).

Never mix old solutions together when consolidating display or cooler buckets and never pour old solutions into fresh buckets. Also, just as you wouldn't change your car's oil with four quarts of different brands, don't mix and match your flower solutions. Subtle differences in formulations can gunk up your flowers' fuel lines, so be consistent and brand loyal.

Give Your Flowers What They Want

Sustainable businesses are low-waste businesses, and sustainable florists are those that correctly pair the right solution with the right flower. (Think of yourself as a solution sommelier!)

The prevailing trend in the world of flower solutions is aligning the formula to specific challenges of various crops,



PROCESS THIS Sustainable processing practices used by growers and importers, such as Eleanor Clevenger of Transflora, during 2008 Outstanding Varieties Competition included reusing hydration solutions.

like those of bulbs. One size fits most is OK, but in today's market, OK won't do. By using a more precise formula, you can add between two to five days, or a 20 to 50 percent gain in vase life, depending on flower type. This is especially important in mixed bouquets. Your strategy here is like triage — give the most attention to the weakest elements. A mixed bouquet featuring Oriental lilies, chrysanthemums, nerines and delphiniums is shot if the nerines turn blue or the Orientals flop, so it makes sense to treat those delicate buds to a solution formulated for bulb flowers to the end. Let the bullet-proof flowers come along for the ride.

Sustainable practices are good for the earth and good for business (be sure to tell your customers about your efforts). They deliver a color combination that will thrill your accountant, your customers and Mother Nature: green and black! 🌿

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