

Care & Handling

Test Your Care IQ, Part II

By Gay Smith

LAST MONTH, I GAVE READERS A FEW CARE-AND-handling questions borrowed from a mock game show modeled after “Jeopardy!”, at SAF Lake Las Vegas 2005. If you used the quiz, how did you and your employees fare? If you missed the January issue, see Info to Go to catch up on those questions. This month, I have a few more common questions to add to the mix. Careful! Some are tricky.

Question: Why won't my gerberas stand straight?

Answer: Gerberas are sensitive to stem clogging. Always use clean vases, solution and tools when working with them.

Q: How soon after harvest should flowers be cooled?

A: Immediately: Good temperature control (from harvest to retailer) makes a difference on longevity once flowers arrive at consumers' homes. Cool harvested material quickly to avoid heat stress. Cool and hold flowers and foliage at 33°F to 38°F until the point of sale to maximize vase performance for the end consumer.

Q: Why do corsages turn spotty after being sprayed with water and placed in the cooler overnight?

A: Sometimes, it's a problem with soluble salts in the water, but often it's the ubiquitous disease Botrytis. Botrytis spores need only four hours of continuous moisture and cool temperature to germinate.

Q: Should flower stems be cut at an angle or straight across?

A: It doesn't matter, but it is very important to use a clean, sharp tool. Dip knives and cutters in an anti-microbial solution throughout the day to prevent contamination.

Q: My ginger and heliconia dry out after two days in the store. Why?

A: Tropical beauties love high humidity and lose more moisture than they can replenish when stored in dry, cool environments (i.e. air conditioned) or dry, warm locations (i.e. heater air). Fill a water bottle with distilled water and mist tropical flowers throughout the day to keep them happy.



Info To Go

Handout Help, Part II

Get a worksheet with the questions from this month's column, but not the answers, by clicking on the Info to Go logo on SAF's member Web site, www.safnow.org. Or, get it via Fast Fax by calling (888) 723-2000 and requesting document #811.

Test Your Care IQ, Part I

Read last month's column by clicking on the Info to Go logo on SAF's member Web site, www.safnow.org. Or, get it via Fast Fax by calling (888) 723-2000 and requesting document #812.

Pass, Fail

How did you do? Use this scale to find out:

- A: Eight or nine correct answers (Very good, smarty-pants! Take a week off.)
- B: Six or seven correct answers (You're a good flower handler! Keep reading *Floral Management* for updates and refreshers.)
- C: Four or five correct answers (Turn off your iPod and pay attention. Read the instructions before you mix solutions.)
- D: Two or three correct answers (Sorry. At this rate, you'll be washing buckets forever.)
- E: Less than two correct answers (Consider a different career possibility — or get going on care-and-handling research.)

Q: Should I remove anthers (pollen-bearing organs) of lilies?

A: Removing anthers keeps pollen stains off clothes and tablecloths. It also improves vase life by slowing the aging process of the blooms. To remove lily pollen, use scotch or masking tape to lift it off the fibers. Brushing off the pollen by hand can set the stain.

Q: When I mix daffodils or narcissus with iris, freesia and tulips in spring arrangements, everything but the daffodils and narcissus dies quickly. Why?

A: Narcissus and daffodils exude a slimy sap that is toxic to some flowers — especially other bulb flowers. The sap accelerates a bacteria explosion in the water, so process these flowers in a solution containing an anti-microbial element, rather than plain tap water. Cut flowers and let stems drink for one to two hours to allow sap flow to stop. Don't give the stem a fresh cut when using them in mixed bouquets or arrangements or the sap will start flowing again.

Q: How do you keep foliage on protea from turning black?

A: High sugar and lots of light help prevent foliage blackening. Growers, bouquet-makers and wholesale florists should process protea in a high-sugar flower food — the same kind used to fill consumer vases and soak foam. Store protea at 34°F to 38°F in a lighted cooler.

Q: Do I have to measure flower food solutions?

A: Yes! If you under-dose when mixing, your solution does not contain ample biocides to keep bacteria in check and make the water flow into stems. Less than 80 percent of the recommended dosage can result in odors, cloudy solutions, stem discoloration, petal shape or color deficiencies, limp petals and leaves, leaf yellowing and poor flower opening. 🌸

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