

TLC WEDDINGS: PRIME TIME FOR PROPER CARE

> Just like the relationships they celebrate, wedding flowers need nurturing and attention way before the big day. As a florist, you profit from bridal flowers when you get selective from the start — choosing the right flowers for the time of year and doing so well in advance.

Informed purchasing and smart handling are the keys to glowing, gushing customers and handsome profits.

Is the Timing Right?

First, let's look at purchasing practices relating to seasonal availability. Worldwide sourcing of flowers means almost everything is accessible all the time, if price is no object. And brides often request out-of-season flowers. Consider Mr. Most-Eligible Bachelor: the Peony. Grown in the continental U.S.,

rates when ordering. I realize it sounds obvious, but every wholesaler has stories about customers ordering 'Casa Blanca' lilies for a Wednesday delivery to cover a Saturday wedding. Many Oriental lilies open slowly; get them in your shop at least five days before design work begins.

Special Flowers, Special Considerations

Does vase life even matter, for weddings? Think of all those party guests who take home arrangements and share stories about the elegant designs — and their terrific longevity! So, in short: yes.

Take hydrangeas: these suckers drink more than Uncle Bernie at the reception, so approach their hydration in two steps. First, let blooms drink a hydrating solution overnight, then transfer them into a vase

Whether you call them garden, English, or David Austin, those frilly, fragrant roses continue to gain popularity. They fare best with a two-step processing: First, hydrate them overnight in Chrysal Rose Pro hydration or Floralife Hydraflor. Then fill vases with a full-sugar vase solution (Floralife Crystal Clear or Chrysal's Rose Pro Vase) for designing. Keep petals dry, resist the urge to peel the petal guards and don't strip foliage until flowers are completely turgid.

More tactics that don't cost a penny, but have tremendous payback: keeping blooms dry to avoid Botrytis infection, and avoiding bruising, crimping and brushing against petals as you maneuver through coolers. Do this by allowing enough room to get flowers off lower shelves without banging blooms on the upper levels. Everyone knows to sanitize buckets, but don't forget to also clean trash cans weekly and dip brooms into sanitizing solutions while cans soak to avoid sweeping Botrytis spores all over the work room. Use the right size buckets to allow blooms to breathe.

Show You Care

A final step for reducing shrink? Post these guidelines in the design room, for everyone to see:

1) Prepare flower solutions with cold water. Tests show that cold solutions flow faster into stems than warm or tepid, and cold water reduces condensation that occurs when bunches are taken from the cooler and processed into warm solutions.

2) Measure when mixing. Guessing at the dosage wastes time and money and gives poor vase results.

3) Pair the right solution with the right flower. Rose, gerbera and bulb solutions target these blooms' specific challenges and produce eye-popping results. 🌸

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RUFFLED DREAMS Getting your bride the fully open blooms she envisions, like these from California designer Julie Stevens, requires well-timed procurement.

peonies are generally available from April to Memorial Day. But the window widens into July and August if the flowers come from Alaska and extends all the way into December if you source from New Zealand. But this availability comes at a cost, which salespeople and brides must realize. (Create an availability chart of wedding favorites so staff can suggest affordable substitutions without losing any rhythm in their presentations.)

Fools Rush In

Astute buyers provide ample lead-time for procurement. Weddings are all about delivering "wow," an effect created by fully-opened blooms. Consider opening

solution. Cut above the old tissue when prepping stems because hydrangeas won't drink through mature wood. Using an anti-transpirant to slow down respiration? Good! Let it dry completely before moving stems into the cooler.

Is your bride giddy for gerberas? Treat them with slow release chlorine pills offered by Chrysal or Floralife. These work for daffodils and cut hyacinths, too. In fact, any flower highly sensitive to pollution or that puts out a lot of gunk itself (see More Online, p. 6) benefits from this treatment. Let gerberas drink for six to 12 hours. Use clean buckets so the pills' fighting action isn't wasted attacking bucket scum.