

TUNE-UP YOUR TULIP CARE

> In 17th century Holland, the tulip was considered a true exotic and used as currency during the era known as “tulipomania.” Today, the tulip is still highly prized for its simple, yet elegant beauty. Years of breeding tulips have produced numerous colors and forms, useful for many florist applications as both potted plants and cut flowers.

That beauty is fleeting, however, as special care and attention is essential to get the most of tulips’ relatively short vase life. Proper handling enhances performance and wards off nagging problems such as sub-optimum vase life, leaf yellowing and stem elongation (stretching). With proper care, tulips can last three to seven days for the consumer, depending on the variety and the stage at purchase. Try different varieties to find those that perform best (see *Fresh Choices*, p. 16).

Buy Right. Tulip stems are harvested when the entire bud has colored but remains tight. This stage is critical for flowers to open satisfactorily, develop good petal color and achieve maximum vase life. Flowers should still be at a tight-bud stage upon arrival to your store. Tulips arriving with open flowers have likely been stored too long or exposed to high temperatures — either of which warrants an immediate call to your supplier.

Bring on the Big Gulp. Hydrate immediately upon arrival. If you have to store tulips overnight, keep boxes upright at 33°F to 35°F. Cut stems and remove all of the white fleshy stem base to allow better water uptake and get rid of any foliage that will be underwater. Place stems immediately in either a specialized bulb or tulip food. These specialized solutions are designed to minimize stem elongation, reduce or eliminate leaf yellowing and extend vase life.

Help Them Take a Stand. Cut-tulip stems may lack the ability to stand upright if they have been out of water for an extended period and will need to take up water to regain their turgidity and



KEEP THEM COOL, OR ELSE When displayed at room temperature, these ‘Yokohama’ tulips on the left opened too quickly. Those stored in a cooler (right) stayed tight and enjoyed a longer vase life.

strength. The stem will assume whatever shape it is in when it takes up water. Therefore, stems will need support to stay straight during hydration to avoid crooked stems. Wrapping a slightly damp newspaper tightly around the stem with an elastic band will accomplish this. The hydration solution should also be lukewarm (100-110°F). Hydrate at room temperature for at least two hours (three to six hours if flowers were limp), prior to use or before placing in your cooler.

Danger, Daffodils! Never place tulips in the same hydration bucket as freshly cut daffodils. Daffodils excrete a slimy, gelatinous substance that can clog tulip stems and reduce their vase life (as well as those of other cut flower species). If you want a mixed bouquet to include daffodils and tulips, keep daffodils in a separate holding bucket for a few hours after cutting and before placing with other flowers.

Limit Stretching. Tulips need to be displayed in cold conditions to keep flowers from opening too fast, reduce stem stretch and maximize vase life. Display cooler temperatures of 33°F to 35°F are ideal. If displaying outside of coolers, return them to the cooler at night. Insert tulips into arrangements at the last possible moment. Tulip stems often continue to elongate and can grow out of arrange-

ments, so place them deeper into the design to allow for growth. Fresh-cut tulips use lots of water, especially in the first two days, so check water levels daily.

Don’t Over-Sweat the Ethylene Threat. Tulips are relatively insensitive to ethylene, but if exposed to very high levels, they may show signs of bud wilt, petal bluing and reduced vase life. So, don’t detour from your habit of keeping all flowers away from sources of the gas, such as vehicle exhaust and ripening fruit.

Sell ‘Em Tight. For maximum vase life in the home, tulips should leave the shop before they open. Give customers specialized tulip or bulb food packets and tips on placing them in a cool area, with high light, that’s away from direct sunlight and drafts. Remind them that tulips have an unquenchable thirst and need daily water-level checks.

Follow our care advice to keep your blooms lasting longer, and you and your customers may become the next “tulip maniacs”! 🌷

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