

VIBRANT, VIGOROUS CELOSIA



FABULOUS FEATHERS 'Pampus Plume', a plume celosia, gives arrangements a feathery feel. This variety comes in a wide range of colors.

HEAT THAT LASTS In experiment with 'Fire Chief', a popular variety of cockscomb celosia, the authors found that vase life can reach 31 days if harvested when head size is only 1-inch in diameter. However, waiting until head size is larger produces more attractive specimens.

> Celosias are the chameleons of the cut flower world. That is, they look natural in almost any type of design or bouquet. They also work well as dried cuts and can even be used in potpourri.

Three Terrific Textures

There are three groups of celosia: cockscombs, plumes and wheats. Cockscombs, or crested types, have large, convoluted flower heads with a coiled appearance.

Popular cockscomb varieties include the round-headed 'Chief' and 'Cramer's' series. Another, the 'Bombay' series, has a narrow head, providing some height in designs.

Plumes have large, feathery flower heads that lend a wispy feel to arrangements. There are several excellent varieties of plume celosias: the 'Sunday' series, which has a long postharvest life; 'Pampus Plume', which comes in a large array of colors; and 'Sylphid', which grows tall and straight, and is a gorgeous chartreuse, perfect for many bouquets.

Wheat celosias have many small, slender spikes. They come in a restricted color range of pale pink, pink, and pale purple, but they make great filler flowers. The foliage often has a purplish tint, and in the cool weather of the fall, both flower and foliage color will deepen. Popular varieties include the 'Flamingo' series and 'Ruby Parfait'.

Hybrids on the Horizon

Plant breeders have been having fun with this great cut flower, selecting a number of types that blur the lines between all three groups, such as the 'Celway' and 'Enterprise' series. From a breeder's perspective, it doesn't really matter what group the celosia comes from, as long as the color and size are right.

They Go On and On and On

Unlike many species of cut flowers, celosias can be harvested over a long period and still provide long-lasting cuts for the retailer and customer. In a recent study of 'Fire Chief', a cockscomb variety, we determined that harvesting at an early stage (when head size is less than one inch in diameter) had a longer vase life (31 days) than later harvests, which lasted 23 or 18 days for those with a head size of 1- to 2 inches or larger than 2 inches, respectively. However, stems harvested later when the heads were larger were more attractive.

Retaining two to three leaves on the stem helps maintain freshness by increasing water uptake by the stems. When buying stems, however, keep in mind that older flowers can form seeds, which will drop off the stems as small, shiny black dots. This, generally, is not a big deal, but the seeds can be a bit messy if you use a lot of celosia in a bouquet or arrangement. When selecting your bunches of celosia, gently shake a bunch or two to see if they drop seeds.

After receipt of the stems, recut and place in a holding solution, such as Floralife Clear Professional Food, or

Chrysal Clear Professional 2. For optimum longevity, do not use foam in arrangements with celosia. They drink a lot; foam may reduce the water supply and weaken the stems. Also keep an eye on water quantity in the buckets and vases. If they run dry, refill them with quality, clean water, and recut the celosia stems to restore water uptake. Always use clean water and buckets/vases to avoid stem tissue degradation, which causes solution turbidity and microbial build up.

While the stems last a long time in the vase, celosia doesn't store well and cut stems should be used as soon as possible. Celosia will be damaged if stored for longer than a week at temperatures less than 40°F.

Leftover stems can be hung upside down to dry in a warm nook in the shop. Don't wait too long to make the decision on whether to use them fresh or dry, as the heads should be at peak color when drying. While wheat celosia also dries easily, it tends to shatter easily and can be messy to use.

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