

## Zinnia: Care Tips for the Florist

1. Purchase zinnias when the buds are just beginning to open, or at the latest, when they're half open. If zinnias are purchased in the fully opened state, when they resemble large pancakes, their vase life will only be about two days.

2. Since zinnias are garden flowers, their maximum vase life will only be about five days under the best of circumstances. Therefore, it's important to begin conditioning them immediately on their arrival in your shop. To begin conditioning, unpack the flowers and loosen the stems to allow for some air circulation.

3. Cut off approximately 1 inch from the bottoms of the stems, using a sharp florist's knife or scissors.

4. Remove excess foliage, especially leaves that will be submerged in water, to prevent rotting.

5. Place the flowers in a solution of warm (80° to 100°F) water and preservative and place in a 40°, darkened refrigerator for several hours before use in an arrangement.

6. While storing zinnias, check the level of water daily and replenish as needed.

7. Zinnias have pithy, watery stems which are hollow near the flower head. To support them in an arrangement, try pushing a 2-inch piece of florist's wire down through the flower head from the top into the stem.

8. Because of their relatively short vase life, consider using zinnia *buds* in your designs. They will open in the customer's home, thus adding to their total vase life. If you do this however, be sure to allow enough room in the arrangement for the flowers to open fully.

9. There are two main kinds of zinnias available to florists: minis and giants. Minis are especially useful for bridal bouquets because their vast range of color (almost everything except blue) makes it easy to match gowns. When building bridal bouquets with minis, be sure to put each stem in a water tube to prolong life. Giant zinnias are good choices for party arrangements because of their color range and size. But for everyday home arrangements, the zinnias' relatively short vase life is a mark against them.

## What to Tell Your Customers

1. Zinnias are primarily garden flowers, so their vase life will not be as long as more common florist flowers. It's particularly important, therefore, to take proper care of them to make them last as long as possible.

2. Zinnias are susceptible to water loss—and early wilting—if exposed to any kind of drafts or heat. Keep them away from air vents, radiators, television sets or windows that receive direct sunlight.

3. The water level for zinnias in a vase or arrangement should be checked daily and re-

plenished as needed. To check the water saturation of an arrangement, touch the florist foam with your finger and press down lightly. The foam should release some water if touched.

4. When adding water to zinnias, make sure you also add floral preservative, mixed in a water solution according to the instructions on the package. Preservative is available from your florist.

5. Zinnias treated in this way should last about five days.—C.J.S.

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