Perfect Prep Prevents Poor Performance

> Nothing could unravel Gayla Harvey’s diligent efforts selling, consulting and designing a wedding (see cover story, p. 24) quite like garden roses that don’t open or hydrangeas that shrivel up. To keep customers satisfied and Tiger Lily Florist’s reputation sterling, Harvey and her colleagues pay special attention to the final steps of the wedding business: flower processing, storage and set up.

For the most part, flowers for event work receive the same care and handling treatment as everyday buds. “Whether we’re processing flowers for a wedding or a birthday arrangement, we go through the same steps to make sure they’re hydrated and fresh,” Harvey said. Those basic steps:

■ strip the foliage
■ cut the stems
■ place in a bucket with an instant hydration pretreatment to increase water uptake*
■ add flower food*
■ keep at room temperature for two to three hours (“We want flowers to get acclimated to our conditions,” Harvey said.)
■ put in the cooler

There’s no official checklist — “we all store it in our heads,” Harvey said — but the Charleston, S.C., shop has an accountability system in place where the person who processed the flowers highlights which products he or she handled and marks his or her initials, attesting he or she did all the steps. “If something ever does go wrong, we then know who to talk to so we can review the process,” Harvey said. At Tiger Lily, there are two dedicated flower processors and an intern who assists them.

The majority of materials for a Saturday wedding arrive on Tuesday, with any stragglers coming in on Wednesday. “It is so important that everything opens just right for a wedding, so we can’t wait to process them a day or two in advance,” Harvey said.

TLC for Big Day Blooms

Just as they do to hairdos and makeup, heat and humidity can wreak havoc on flowers. Harvey shared some of Tiger Lily’s specific care and handling practices for flower types that take the most trips down the aisle:

■ **Hydrangeas** go in fresh water, not foam, during Charleston’s hottest months (May through September). If customers oppose the look of a vase, Harvey uses a wet wrap. She takes a paper towel, submerges it in water and attaches it to the stems. She then secures the wrap with cellophane, and covers it with ribbon or moss to disguise the mechanics.

■ **Callas** go in a vase with one inch of water. “Any more than that, and they’ll get mushy and moldy.”

■ **Dahlias** hydrate in plain water with no flower food. “We’ve tried it both ways and they respond better with nothing added.”

■ **Garden roses** and **peonies** hydrate in flower food at room temperature until the event. “We want them to open with nice, large blooms so we keep them out of the cooler all week.”

■ **Cymbidium orchids** use flower food and then go in the cooler with a cover over them to prevent freezing.

■ **Boutonnieres, corsages and bouquets** get sprayed with a finishing spray*.

Down to the Hour

For outdoor nuptials in the low country, Tiger Lily employees set up no earlier than 45 minutes before the ceremony starts. “At least 80 percent of the processing and arranging has been done in advance, so this really isn’t tough,” Harvey said. Thirty minutes before the wedding begins, they douse flowers with water one more time. “By the time guests arrive, there’s no sign the flowers had recently been soaked,” she said. The last step is to make sure brides know how to check and change the water if they choose to reuse the flowers the following morning at a brunch, a popular tradition with Charleston locals.

Katie Hendrick

* Tiger Lily uses Floralife products; Chrysal and Syndicate Sales also carry each of these products.