NEW SHORTCUT IN THE DESIGN ROOM?

Years ago, if you wanted a great home-made lasagna, you had to plan pretty far ahead — not only dedicating time to the sauce and the goodies inside the dish, but also to getting the pasta perfectly al dente.

Then no-boil noodles came along and gave home cooks everywhere a big shortcut — one that delivered the same delicious results, but required less time and energy.

New research is promising a similar revolution in the design room.

Age-Old Advice Questioned
Give stems a good (clean) cut before you start processing them in your store.

Though not every florist follows this advice religiously, it has become a care-and-handling staple in many design rooms across the country, as second nature as turning on the lights in the morning or locking the doors at night.

It’s an easy, simple way to optimize vase life for customers, right?

But what if you didn’t have to re-cut stems? Imagine the labor you’d save, particularly around the holidays, when high volume can make the act of re-cutting a little less fast and easy. Is it possible to have great results without that good old clean cut?

That’s the question Floralife decided to tackle when the company embarked upon research to develop a technology that could eliminate the need to re-cut stems.

“Re-cutting stems has always required lots of man-hours, not to mention special cutting tools, waste management practices, etc.,” said Catherine Jakaitis, Floralife’s director of global marketing. “Successful elimination of a labor-intensive step has always been on our radar.”

Research Rubric
For the study, sampling started with roses and then grew to include all the most popular flower varieties. Cut flowers received standard farm protocols and treatments in Colombia and were then air freighted to Miami, where they again received standard storage and handling protocols. From there, the dry-pack flower boxes were air freighted to the Floralife lab in Walterboro, South Carolina.

At the Walterboro lab, the flowers were taken out of their boxes and processed on the day of receipt. Some of the flower stems were re-cut to remove 3 cm from the end of the stem. Other flowers were not re-cut.

Both re-cut and non-re-cut flowers were then placed in 1-liter vases filled with solutions. Flowers that had been re-cut were placed in solutions of Floralife Clear 200, the company’s popular storage and transport concentrate for cut flowers. Flowers that had not been re-cut were placed in Floralife’s new Express Clear 200. Both sets of flower vases were then placed in an interior evaluation room (64 to 68 F, 12 hours of light/12 hours of dark), and the resulting flower quality was observed.

The research involved testing “hundreds of thousands of stems from around the world,” both in the lab and in the field, according to Jakaitis. Two independent labs verified results, as did testing at importers in Miami and at wholesale and retail operations.

Results Come In
So, how did the flowers look, and how did the vase lives compare, at the end of the experiment?

About the same. Flowers that had not been re-cut, but that were treated with Floralife Express Clear 200, presented “equal vase life” compared to those treated with the current Floralife Clear 200 formula along with re-cutting of their stems.

Jim Kaplan, president of Chrysal USA, said his company also has experimented with a solution that would eliminate the need for re-cutting, but they’ve found too many variable results across flowers. “With some flowers it worked, with others, not so much,” he said. Why risk it, he added, when one wilted flower can ruin an entire bouquet. “For 100 years, we’ve told the flower world that re-cutting is the best way to go,” he said. “We still believe this. You cut away the blocking and open up all that vascular cell structure. That’s what we’ve preached for a long time. That’s what we still preach today.”

For her part, Jakaitis said Floralife stands behind its research results, which were consistent across all regions and all flower types. “We are very proud and delighted to have developed this transformative technology,” she said, adding that, as with any new postharvest solution, retailers and wholesalers should perform a trial with intended flowers before implementing a full-scale switch into everyday practice. The solution is being used in the United States, Europe, Japan and Australia.

And what about florists who just can’t let go of the re-cut, after years of being told that’s what they must do? Jakaitis might say to take a note from pasta’s transition to a “to boil or not to boil?” choice. As long as you have great ingredients and follow proper prep, the result will be happy diners — or, in this case, flower recipients.

“Some florists will be hesitant — namely, those who don’t like change,” Jakaitis acknowledged. “Others will be delighted with the savings, and the good results.”

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