Alstroemeria are the darlings of consumers, ranking just behind mini-carnations as a top seller. Consumers love them because they last forever — easily 12 to 14 days — and they’re easy to care for; wilted stems perk back up even when they’re left out of water for hours. The flowers are also fragrance-free, so they don’t irritate allergy-sensitive flower lovers, and they’re available in all kinds of interesting colors and variegations. Even the foliage has an interesting twist: The leaves are always upside down. (Because of a condition called “resupinate,” a spiral growth pattern forces the leaves to twist as they grow from the stem, forcing the bottom of the leaf to face skyward.)

If you have shied away from alstroemeria before, or if you’ve been taking them for granted, they may be worth a closer look: A more open cut point, careful netting of florets, and strong, sturdy stems place these flowers in a class of their own.

**Prevention From Grower to Retailer**
Because this perennial crop is ethylene sensitive, ensuring longevity starts at the grower level. That means growers must make sure the first drink after harvest contains STS, an anti-ethylene solution to ward off the negative effects of ethylene exposure. Exposure causes transparent petals and short vase life.

Premature leaf yellowing can also be a problem. Growers, wholesalers and retailers can avoid the problem by processing alstroemeria in a solution specific to bulbous flowers to rebalance cell chemistry. Chrysal and Floralife both offer bulb food, and the best effects are achieved when bulb food is used at every step as blooms move through the chain — all the way to the consumer level with bulb flower food sachets.

Alstroemeria should be shipped and stored between 33 F and 38 F. Upon arrival in your design room, process bunches by cutting on arrival one inch off the stems and then placing the stems in cold bulb food. Condensation will need to evaporate, so allow breathing room in your buckets and always work clean. Clean tools, clean buckets and clean solution are key to vase longevity.

**New Waves of Vibrant, Colorful Blooms**
Remember that today’s varieties of alstroemeria are bred from crosses between the summer-growing species from Brazil and winter-growing species from Chile. (See sidebar, for more history.) Shipping conditions from Latin America have perpetuated a tight harvest stage. When stems are allowed extra time developing on mother plants, however, the color vibrancy and bloom size are both spectacular.

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**BY ANY OTHER NAME?**
The only thing difficult about alstroemeria is the correct pronunciation of its tongue-twisting name. The name comes from Clas Alströmer, the Swedish baron who named the genus and also happened to be a close friend of Carolus Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist who developed binomial nomenclature, the plant classification system still used today.

Some of your customers may call alstroemeria by another name: Peruvian lilies. That’s how they were sold in the 1970s, when the flowers debuted in U.S. markets. By the end of the decade, however, the Dutch had started exporting improved hybrid alstroemerias and selling plants to Latin American growers.

As growers discovered how well-suited the plant was to a high-altitude environment, the plant took off. It helped that alstroemeria handled the rigors of long-distance transit very well. As interest grew, the Peruvian lily name fell away and the flowers were marketed, bought and sold as alstroemeria, the true genus name. Today almost 100 percent of the alstroemeria grown for the U.S. market comes from Latin America. — G.S.