How long do wedding flowers really need to last? Two days? Three days, tops? While most retail florists would never publicly cop to this attitude, behind closed doors, some florists act as if longevity doesn’t really matter for special events and use that mindset as a justification to take shortcuts. That’s a mistake, and a missed opportunity. Research shows that, almost without exception, any treatment, at any step, improves overall longevity, and while aesthetics are important, longevity is the tipping point consumers use to determine whether they got their money’s worth. Florists who want to impress not only the bride and groom but also the maid of honor (who took home a centerpiece) or the hotel manager (who noted the still-gorgeous designs late into the weekend’s revelry) understand that special-event flowers need specialized care.

This month, we’ll take a look at care tips for the four main categories of popular wedding flowers.

**Bulbous Flowers**

**Examples:** lilies, freesia, tulips, anemones

**Challenges:** These blooms suffer a chemical imbalance when harvested from their bulb, rhizome, corm or tuber, which causes nasty symptoms affecting salability. Namely, premature yellow foliage, stagnant bud opening, yellow stems, short vase life and loss of color vibrancy.

**Care Mantra:** Get scientific. Rebalancing cellular chemistry alleviates problems, so always process these blooms in bulb food. Both Chrysal and Floralife offer special bulb formulas that make a dramatic difference. Vase longevity is improved by more than four days, all florets open, foliage color remains healthy green and petal color is vivid to the end. Remember to measure and always use cold water when mixing solutions for bulbous flowers.

**“Dirty Flowers”**

**Examples:** sunflowers, dahlias, kale, stock, gerbs

**Challenges:** Field-grown beauties that arrive at the packing shed or flower shop with stem “bark” covered with germs are pretty but dirty. Even greenhouse-grown blooms such as gerberas are sensitive to pollution because hairy stems attract germs like bees to pollen. Solutions become quickly contaminated as stem-clinging germs wash off in water and mingle with the enzymes, carbohydrates and sugars bled out by freshly cut flower stems. A juice bar for bacteria!

**Care Mantra:** Clean, clean, clean. Make sure the first drink contains a gerbera pill so the fill is super-clean water. After two to four hours (and up to two days), transfer stems into flower food, prepared according to directions in clean buckets, of course.

**Wilt-Sensitive Blooms**

**Examples:** garden roses, hydrangeas

**Challenges:** Flowers droop when the water balance is out of sync. Jet lag is a fast way to dehydrate flowers (and people). Temperature stress will also do the trick, but on a more subtle level, stem blockage is the demon causing roses to have bent neck and hydrangeas to flop. Air bubbles and bacteria are big culprits.

**Care Mantra:** Hydration followed by flower food. For wilt-sensitive blooms, a hydration solution is key. First drink in Chrysal Professional #1 or HydraFlor 100, which turns on the vascular system and boosts flow by dissolving air bubbles and keeping clean water flowing into heads. Once hydrated (after a minimum of four hours and up to three days), transfer blooms into flower food so glucose has a chance to mimic Mother Nature and provide the energy for blooms to open.

**Sugar Lovers**

**Examples:** peonies, lisianthus, tube-roses, gardenias, stephanotis, protea

**Challenges:** Sugar, in the form of glucose, stabilizes color, provides energy for buds to open and enhances fragrance potential if it exists. Glucose will also help prevent cala stem curl and lessen protea leaf blackening.

**Care Mantra:** Feed ‘em. Sugar lovers should be cut and placed directly in full-load flower food, the same stuff used to fill vases. Gardenias and stephanotis, however, have a few special needs: They prefer a low-sugar holding solution (Chrysal Professional 2 or Floralife Professional 200), and it’s important to handle their blooms with wet hands and to mix the solution with bottled water to avoid the salts and minerals in tap water that cause pepper spots on flowers. Give the short stems of steph florets and gardenia blooms a fresh cut and float (for at least an hour) in flower food prior to design work.

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