If you follow just a few simple scientific principles, care and handling of flowers and greens should be easy. However, home remedies, urban legends and conventional wisdom are often confused with facts. Unfortunately, these myths cost retailers money, and they don’t provide any benefit to customers. In some cases, they may actually harm the flowers. Here are some of the most pervasive myths, along with tips on how to truly achieve the results you’re after.

**MYTH: To increase water absorption, cut stems at an angle.**

**Fact:** While angled stems are easier to insert into floral foam, they won’t absorb more water. A related myth — that *smashing stems will increase water uptake* — can damage stems and actually block absorption. *Waxing the base of stems to “lock in water”* is also bogus; doing so will prevent water uptake entirely.

**Proven Solution:** Cut stems with a sharp knife or clippers, and you’ll improve water uptake and limit damage to the stem.

**MYTH: Removing thorns is harmless.**

**Fact:** While thorns have no real function in the postharvest life of flowers, when you remove them, you damage the stem and provide a point of entry for diseases. Plus, as stem sap leaks into the water, it becomes food for microbes.

**Proven Solution:** Thorns are a nuisance, but diseased flowers are a bigger pain. Leave the thorns alone.

**MYTH: It’s all right to strip leaves from stems.**

**Fact:** Leaves are responsible for more than 90 percent of the water pulled up the stem. Take off the leaves, and flowers die more rapidly. Stripping leaves also releases cell sap into the vase solution. Mechanical, handheld strippers aren’t the answer. Research has shown that bacterial levels are higher, vase life is reduced and bent necks are more common when these devices remove leaves.

**Proven Solution:** Take off leaves that fall below the water line using a sharp knife or thick rubber gloves used for rose-stripping. Don’t strip the others.

**MYTH: Leaving a light on in coolers increases vase life.**

**Fact:** Lighting in flower coolers is so low there is no benefit to the flower. Plus, most flowers are wrapped in sleeves or other packaging that prevents light from reaching the leaves.

**Proven Solution:** Placing flowers in a dark cooler may actually allow for more-rapid water balance after stems are recut and placed into hydration or flower food solutions.

**MYTH: Removing outer petals does not affect vase life.**

**Fact:** If you remove outer petals you risk damaging the flower. You’ll also stimulate the production of ethylene, which is created in the base of the flower. Do that and you’ll reduce vase life.

**Proven Solution:** If you must remove blackened or damaged petals, do it carefully. Restraint is key.

**MYTH: Spraying or misting water delays flower opening.**

**Fact:** Water promotes the development of fungal spores and can worsen diseases such as Botrytis.

**Proven Solution:** Water needs to be inside the flower, not on the surface. You can safely mist corsages and boutonnieres, which have no other source for water absorption.

**MYTH: Hot water extends vase life.**

**Fact:** Warm water may increase the initial water absorption, but research has shown that hydration water temperatures between 35 degrees Fahrenheit and 110 degrees Fahrenheit do not affect vase life. Another myth — adding ice to hydration solutions to cool flowers — will only dilute solutions.

**Proven Solution:** Warm hydration solutions will promote more-rapid flower opening, which may be desirable in certain cases. If you need cold solutions, just place the solutions in the cooler overnight before adding flowers.

**MYTH: Homemade flower food solutions that use soda, alcohol, bleach or pennies are as effective as commercial products.**

**Fact:** Sodas and alcohol provide sugar and may limit microbial activity, but only for a short period. These products can be quite expensive and do not offer the proper balance of chemicals needed to adjust pH, promote water absorption and control microbes. Bleach is an effective disinfectant — but only for 30 minutes. And save your pennies: copper only works as an antimicrobial agent if it’s soluble.

**Proven Solution:** Rely on scientific hydration and flower food products, and save your distilled spirits for happy hour!

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