RELYING ON CARE FACTS, NOT FICTION

Research shows that a few clear, simple steps for handling cut flowers can optimize vase life and performance. Unfortunately, too many florists often rely on myths rather than science. Doing so can make your job harder and more costly. In fact, myths and misunderstandings can lead to dirty vase water, short vase life and reduced profits. Your flowers will last longer and your customers will be happier if you understand the following care and handling myths.

The Myth: Ethylene gas only occurs in the air.
The Science: Ethylene in the air can damage flowers, but ethylene is also produced within the flower itself. Ethylene is a naturally occurring plant hormone that’s also known as the “wound hormone.” Mechanical damage during packaging, vibration during shipping, water stress, transport at less than desirable temperatures and excessive storage can all cause the flower to produce ethylene internally.

The Solution: Ethylene damage can occur even in environments free of airborne ethylene and can be prevented only by treatment with an anti-ethylene product following harvest.

The Myth: Roses are not ethylene sensitive.
The Science: Premature wilting and early death of flowers, petal drop, and browning of leaf margins are a few of the symptoms of ethylene damage to roses. In most cases, the ethylene causing these symptoms is produced by the flowers themselves, following wounding or damage during packaging or shipping.

The Solution: While some rose varieties can tolerate ethylene more than others, up to 75 percent of rose varieties are sensitive to ethylene, so be sure the roses you purchase have been treated with anti-ethylene products.

The Myth: Cut stems at a slant for longer vase life.
The Science: Angle of stem cut does not affect vase life. Designers use slant cuts so that the cut stem can be inserted into floral foam easier. The slant cut increases the total surface area of the stem but does not increase the amount of solution that can be absorbed or flower vase life.

The Solution: The angle may not matter but do be sure that flowers are cut with a sharp, clean knife, clippers or cutter.

The Myth: smashed the base of stems to increase water uptake and vase life.
The Science: Smashing damages and likely destroys the lower sections of the stem and may result in stem pieces blocking water uptake once stems are placed into hydration solutions. Smashing may increase the number of microbes in the water that can block water absorption.

The Solution: Instead of smashing, use a sharp knife or cutter.

The Myth: You must cut stems underwater.
The Science: Studies in the U.S. and the Netherlands have shown that cutting stems underwater decreases vase life or, at best, vase life is equal to stems cut dry. Underwater cutting results in the microbes from the cut stems collecting in the water reservoir. These microbes multiply rapidly and are fed by the sugars and nutrients from the cut and damaged stem cells. Then, when additional stems are cut underwater, these microbes are sucked into the stems and block or greatly reduce water uptake.

The Solution: Save time, labor and money. Cut stems dry.

The Myth: Re-cut stems to absorb water.
The Science: New hydration technology allows wholesalers and retailers to place stems into specially designed hydration and flower food solutions without cutting stems.

The Solution: Known as Express Technology from Floralife, these new formulas provide the same or better vase life than use of traditional solutions and re-cut stems. (Chrysal USA has also experimented with the process and can provide custom solutions for customers who do not want to re-cut. Read more at safnow.org./moreonline.)

The Myth: Warm water provides a longer vase life.
The Science: Water temp alone doesn’t affect vase life.

The Solution: Flowers hydrated with cold water containing hydration or flower food solutions and placed into coolers until used will have the longest vase life. While it doesn’t affect vase life, warm water can be used to speed flower opening.

The Myth: Home-brewed flower foods are as good as commercial flower foods.
The Science: Home-made solutions containing aspirin, vinegar and bleach do not offer all of the benefits provided by commercial flower foods. Failing to use proper hydration solutions and flower foods is shortchanging customers from having the best quality and longest lasting flowers.

The Solution: Leave the home-brewing for the craft beer crowd.

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