COMMON SENSE PAGEANTRY

The mega-watt blooms in the Outstanding Varieties Competition may look high maintenance, but when it comes to looking good, the “beauty secrets” are straightforward and easy to replicate in stores across the country, insists Gay Smith: Start with beautiful flowers and give them exactly what they need to thrive — no more and no less. Smith should know. The technical consulting manager at Chrysal USA (and a regular author of this column) has worked with the on-site processing crew at SAF’s annual competition for more than 20 years (and Chrysal has sponsored the solutions used for the last eight), ensuring that each and every entrant is put through the post-harvest procedures proven to maximize bloom life and look their best. She has it down to a science, and says most shop owners can as well. “Getting the results you want is pretty simple,” she promised. “You can actually distill what we do for the competition to three solutions.”

**Gerbera Pills.** “Bacteria clogs stems and makes solutions cloudy,” Smith explained. At Outstanding Varieties, “we use this for all the gerbs.” (There were 21 gerberas among the 266 entries in the 2013 competition.) The one-time use pills are slow-release, which gives them the distinct (and, said Smith, cost-effective) advantage over home-brewed care and handling solutions, including liquid bleach. “With the pills, you’ll have bacterial control for one to three days,” Smith said. If you start with clean buckets, you’ll be on the generous end of that estimate.

**Bulb Solutions.** These offer an eco-friendly, pre-measured formula in a delivery system that indicates flowers are in treated water. “Bulb flowers don’t usually have a problem opening,” Gay said. “Instead, what often happens is that the flower’s plant growth regulators — its hormones — have gotten out of whack at harvest.” Bulb solutions prevent problems such as leaf yellowing and short vase life by lowering the pH and clarifying the water. Unlike flower foods, bulb solutions have very little sugar, because bulb flowers don’t need sugar to open.

**Low-Dose Flower Food.** “For Outstanding Varieties, we use a low-sugar flower food,” Smith said. “There’s enough sugar to stabilize the color and get everything looking great — but we don’t want to provide too much” and force open the blooms too quickly. Sounds a lot like what just what you need for cut flowers on display at the shop. “People get confused about the distinction between hydration and food,” Smith said, and sometimes use hydration solutions as a holding solution, but in doing so, they’re robbing the flowers of the food they need to continue to look good. “Hydration solutions do not have sugar. Flower foods do, but it’s a simple sugar — much different from what’s on your table at home,” and that’s why home remedies such as 7-Up aren’t nearly as effective as commercially produced options. 🌸

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