



BEAT THE HEAT-LOVIN' BACTERIA

> As the mercury rises, so does the bacteria count. Consequently, the summer is a great time not only for weddings (and vacations) but also for adopting more thorough cleaning habits to keep bacteria at bay. But don't worry, you don't have to spend your whole summer vacation on care and handling procedures. Here's a quick and painless protocol to ensure your buds stay their freshest in the summer heat.

Initial Inspection

When you receive your flowers, inspect them — not a few hours later, but right away. First, **check the temperature** of the heads of the flowers with a probe thermometer. You don't have to check all the flowers in a box; two or three should be representative. The temperature should range from 33 F to 44 F. Then, **make sure there is no moisture inside the sleeves**. Moisture indicates that temperatures have fluctuated widely. With higher than recommended temperatures, flowers have an increased chance of having the fungus *Botrytis*; and moisture only helps it spread. If the flowers are too hot or show signs of moisture, contact your supplier.

After inspection, get the flowers into the cooler. **Don't let flowers sit outside your cooler**, waiting to be processed. I spend most of my time visiting wholesalers and retailers around the country, and all too often I witness flowers "in

waiting" outside the coolers. Keeping your flowers in the proper temperature is always important; in the summer, it is imperative due to the heat.

Prior to Processing

Before you even think about processing the flowers, make sure everything they come in contact with is clean. Now it is time to process your flowers. You should **have clean buckets, tools and flower food ready** before your flowers arrive. Again, the enemy bacteria grow faster in the warm months, so make sure you clean your buckets and tools after each use. Tools should be cleaned three to four times a day with a diluted spray bottle, such as Floralive D.C.D. **Don't rinse after cleaning**. Bacteria-fighting chemicals will last longer if you allow them to air dry.

Cool It

Now your flowers are ready for the cooler. Summer will test your equipment, so be sure to monitor the temperature. The best way to do this? **Stick a thermometer in a bucket of water**. Bucket temperature is really more critical to flowers' wellbeing than is air temperature, which also tends to fluctuate. And don't forget to **clean your coolers thoroughly each quarter**. This includes drip pans, coils, filters and the compressor.

Design and Delivery Dos

As you put together arrangements, **use finishing sprays**, especially if you're in an arid climate. Finishing sprays give your flowers added hydration before they reach an air-conditioned home.

After following these tips, don't stop at delivery. Make sure your vans — your coolers away from your cooler — are clean. Also, make sure your drivers know to **run the air conditioning in the van before loading it**. And if your customer has come to pick up flowers, remind them that they are like small children and pets: they're perishable (and precious). **Don't leave them in the heat** with the windows rolled up.

These are simple tips, but as I travel throughout the country visiting flower shops, wholesale warehouses and mass marketers, I rarely see these basic guidelines followed. In the summer, care and handling is paramount to assure flowers beat the heat. And while you may want to take shortcuts when you're busy preparing for a big wedding, avoid the temptation. Replacing flowers in an arrangement will cost you more time and materials in the end. 🌸

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Care and Handling



STRESS BUSTERS Use commercially produced solutions that contain acid, nutrients and germicides to reduce the “stress” flowers endure in summer months, when inside and outside temperatures fluctuate.

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> It's hot, and you need your flowers cool. Follow these tips for keeping flowers fresh and hydrated through the warm summer months.

Prevent Parching

When temperatures fluctuate, as they do between air-conditioned rooms and the summer outdoors, flowers get stressed. And stress reduces vase life. Flowers also get stressed if they're processed into, say, bleach water, aspirin or penny-infused solutions rather than a commercially produced solution that has the acid, nutrients and germicides the flowers so desperately need. Without the germicide, the flower stem gets plugged, preventing the bloom from drinking and sapping the buds of the energy needed to open and last in the vase.

Be sure to process dry-pack flowers as soon as they arrive at the shop. Make sure their first drink is slightly acidic, cold and contains a germicide.

It's tempting during hot months to submerge flowers — blooms and all — in water to revive blooms. Consider the downsides: Any fungus spores that are present will trigger Botrytis infection. So

allow the flowers to drip dry before going into the cooler. The same goes for misting corsages, bouquets, stephanotis and boxed roses; let them dry before returning them to the cooler.

Always use correct processing techniques: Measure when mixing, set up buckets a day ahead to pre-chill solutions, allow time for condensation to evaporate inside sleeves before flowers go in coolers, give stems a fresh cut and hydrate flowers for at least four hours before using them.

The warm weather is particularly tough on flowers that are left dry on design tables, so avoid that when possible. And don't forget to tell your delivery drivers not to smoke or allow exhaust to be sucked into the cargo area, which causes ethylene damage.

Skip Shortcuts

Hotter weather is also a good time to increase the solution level in vases or buckets. Sunflowers, roses, chrysanthemums, dahlias and bouvardia can easily go through a bucket of water in 24 hours on a hot day. Fill those buckets higher than you typically would. Never combine

an old solution with a new one. Even though consolidating buckets may seem the most efficient thing you can do, it's like throwing money down the drain: Old solution plus new solution equals a useless solution!

And if you tinker in growing your own cut flowers on the side — or buy from local hobbyists — process them the same as you would the flowers from your wholesaler: Prep a bucket of flower food so you can immediately place blooms in feeding solution, not tap water, because they drink the most in the first hour. Use clean, sharp shears because dull cutters smash stems or produce ragged cuts, intensifying the amount of cells released into the solution. Stems themselves exude enzymes, carbohydrates and amino acids when cut. All these organic bits cause a feeding frenzy for bacteria. Without a germicide to keep pollution in check, bacteria populations explode fast and block flowers from drinking through vascular tissues. 🌿

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