

THE LAST MILE: PACKAGING FOR DELIVERY

> In the July/August issue, we covered the ways in which packaging for transport can affect the quality of the cut flowers you receive. What about the packaging you yourself provide to protect flowers and arrangements from weather and mechanical damage?

When it comes to packaging for delivery, florists follow different strategies depending on their markets and philosophies. But the advent of curbside pickup and no-contact delivery raised the stakes and caused many to reconsider how much packaging is needed.

It's true that packaging costs time and money and adds to your carbon footprint. But expert packaging can also preserve the investment of time and resources already made in a beautiful floral arrangement. And it can also serve as a branding opportunity.

"We think of it this way: A flower delivery is almost always a gift," says Jerome Raska, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, at Blumz by JRDesigns in Ferndale and Detroit, Michigan. "How would you like to receive a gift? What do you want it to look like?" Packaging can provide extra visual impact — along with the dramatic opportunity for unwrapping.

"We want [delivery drivers] to engage with the customer, educate and communicate."

— Robbyn Repp

Protection Plus

At Blumz, arrangements for delivery are placed in delivery boxes, then wrapped either with clear cellophane, or if the weather threatens to dip below freezing, with a thicker, opaque, "hard wrap" paper (the term used by most suppliers).

"We train our staff to wrap the arrangement, not the container," says Raska. That means the arrangement goes into a box big enough that flowers aren't hanging over the edges of the box. If necessary, the container is wedged inside the box with additional packing material. The box is placed on top of the cello or hard wrap, which is pulled up around it and sealed. (The only exception is in hot weather, when a cello wrap

is left somewhat open at the top, to prevent a greenhouse effect.)

The strategy begins at the work counter, where designers are trained to avoid placing fragile flowers like lilies (which can easily get their petals creased or broken) on the outside of an arrangement. If designers need to copy a design, like a wire-service arrangement, they make an adjustment so that the recipient is getting the same product, but in a more protected placement.

Likewise, at Splash Floral & Event Design in Midland, Ontario, visual impact is a primary consideration. "The packaging has to be gorgeous!" says Splash owner Jaime Crouch. He and his coworkers use recyclable delivery boxes — imprinted with the shop logo — which Crouch calls "squishy boxes" that hug the vessel once it's in place. Colored tissue placed around the vessel also helps to stabilize it, but it's there mainly as a decorative accent. The Splash team uses a cellophane wrapping when the temperature drops, but skips it in the warmer months (May through October), unless it's raining.

Outside the Box

Whenever floral arrangements are transported without boxes, it becomes essential to equip the delivery vehicle with a carrier system to hold the arrangements upright. Many different types are available. At Petal to the Metal Flowers in North Bend, Oregon, Robbyn Repp uses the kind made of stiff yet flexible foam with holes cut in it to accommodate floral containers of various sizes.

Ordinary deliveries from Petal to the Metal may not be boxed or wrapped, but Repp always provides delivery boxes for walk-in customers who are transporting the flowers in their own vehicles, whether as gifts or to their own homes. She also makes a point of providing delivery boxes also to those who have received an arrangement at a hospital or business. The box is handed separately to the recipient, with the explanation, "This is to make sure you can get your arrangement home safely."

Likewise, at Blumz, walk-in customers receive whatever packaging they

need to protect the flowers on the way home, even just walking from the shop to the car, especially if the weather is at freezing temperature.

A different situation arises when arrangements are delivered to funeral homes. "The homes get bombarded with deliveries for a viewing, and then they end up with all this packaging paper," says Raska. "So, we'll put the arrangement in a box and use heavy trash bags to surround and protect it. At the funeral home, we deliver it to the flower room, then we take the bag and the box back to the shop and repurpose them."

Tagged with Care

A care tag should, of course, be a fundamental part of your delivery packaging protocol. Different preprinted tags are available for different products and seasons. For example, there are care tags for plants versus arrangements and special care tags for seasonal designs that include safety warnings about candles.

But are care tags enough? Repp thinks drivers should also be trained to deliver care information proactively: "We don't want them to just hand the arrangement over. We want them to engage with the customer, educate and communicate." Taking that extra step not only helps the customer to be successful with the flowers, but it also develops trust and positions the shop as the expert.

Costing little more than custom-imprinted care tags (less than 9 cents apiece from Multi Packaging Solutions), flower-food packets can also be imprinted with a shop's logo, website, and contact information and are slim enough to be held within a standard cardette holder.

"We attach them with every floral order," says Elizabeth Seiji, AIFD, at Edelweiss Flower Boutique in Santa Monica, California. "Many clients have told me they do use them."

What better way to send the message that your shop cares about the quality of the flowers, even after they have left the shop? 🌸

Bruce Wright is a contributing writer to Floral Management.