

Indoor blooms get help from florists

Flowers are not just for special occasions anymore. More and more consumers are enjoying floral arrangements as an enhancement to their everyday life.

To cherish flowers longer, here are some common questions asked of the Professional Allied Florists of Metro Detroit member florists:

- How long can flowers last? — Each flower's vase life is lengthened by proper care. Here is the vase life of some common flowers: 3 to 5 days for daffodil, marguerite, daisy, tulip; 5 to 7 days for anemone, freesia, iris; 7 to 10 days for aster, delphinium, gerbera, rose, solidaster; 10 to 14 days for alstroemeria, bird-of-paradise, gladiolus, lily, snapdragon, orchids, wax-flower; 2 weeks or more for carnation, chrysanthemum, protea, statice, star-of-Bethlehem.
- How do I know the flower is fresh? — Look for firm bright petals, firm green leaves and firm clean stems. Signs of age include fully open flowers, fading petal color, petal and leafdrop, browning petals and leaves, and limpness.
- Can I keep flowers in the car while shopping? — Not during periods of hot (above 75 degrees F) or cold (below 32 degrees F) temperature extremes. During periods of moderate temperatures, limit the time flowers are in the car to 15 minutes.
- Can I keep flowers in the refrigerator

at home? — Only for a day or two if the flowers are being kept for a special occasion. Wrap them in plastic to prevent water loss and make sure to remove all fruit from the refrigerator, especially apples because fruits and vegetables produce an invisible, odorless gas called ethylene. Ethylene is an aging gas which causes rapid decay of all flowers.

■ Should I cut the stems with a knife or scissors? — Actually floral or garden cutters are best. A dull knife, sewing scissors or wire cutters can pinch and bruise the stems.

■ Must stems be cut at an angle and crushed? — No. A good clean cut with good cutters is best.

■ Are there any other secrets to cutting flowers correctly? — Cut flowers stems underwater. Fill the sink with warm water and hold the lower half of the stems underwater. Cut off 1/4 to 1 inch of stem tip. This is particularly helpful for roses and limp flowers.

■ Should I put aspirin in the water? Vinegar? Tobacco? Fertilizer? — No. No. No. None of these materials provide a balanced diet.

■ Is it OK for leaves to sit in water? — No. Leaves sitting in water will quickly decay and lead to great increases in bacteria in the water. Remove any leaves that will be below the water line.

■ What temperature water should I use? — Generally use warm water that is not too hot to the touch. Warm water is taken up into flower stems faster

and also has less air so there is less chance of air blockage occurring. As an exception, cool water may be used with tulips so they don't open so fast.

■ What kind of container should I use? — Glass or plastic containers are best to use with cut flowers. Make sure the container has sufficient room to hold water so the flowers don't quickly dry out.

■ What is the best way to clean a container before I use it? — Scrub it with liquid Clorox (full strength) and very warm water. Do not simply rinse it out with plain water or soap because harmful, invisible bacteria will not be removed.

■ Should I fill the vase all the way up to the top? — In large vases, this is an overuse of water. In small vases, it is necessary so the flowers don't quickly run out of water.

■ Do I have to change the water in the vase every day? — Not every day, but changing water every few days is helpful. Bacteria starts multiplying in the water and it gets dirty as leaves and petals fall off.

■ What is flower preservative? — It is a product especially made to help lengthen the life of cut flowers. The main ingredients are a type of sugar to provide energy to the cut flowers, along with an acidifying agent to lower the pH (water goes into the stems faster at a lower pH). The mixture also helps to keep bacteria levels in check so the water stays cleaner.

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