

Make Your Outdoor Wedding Flowers *Truly Outstanding*

How to condition cut flowers and foliages to ensure they can withstand the elements when used for outdoor weddings.

It's Tuesday, and you have received the flowers for Saturday's outdoor wedding. Suddenly, the clock begins ticking, counting down the optimum freshness of your blooms.

Time management is critical to vase life, and the unique demands of outdoor weddings complicate your task. Presenting fresh, vibrant flowers on Saturday depends on using tools and talent wisely.

For outdoor weddings, you must consider the elements. Sun, wind and heat will all affect your flowers, primarily in terms of hydration. What can you do?

Flower Selection

You *could* caution your brides that the use of *Hydrangeas*, for instance, is a bad idea on a hot day. Or fillers like ever-thirsty *Bupleurum*. You might suggest one of the interesting new varieties of hardy chrysanthemums or carnations. We all know, however, that brides want what they want. If a bride insists on a potentially "troublesome" flower, ask your supplier for the hardiest variety of that flower – because varieties within a flower type can differ significantly.

Ethylene

Ethylene lurks throughout the flower chain. Many flowers are naturally ethylene sensitive, and improper handling (and higher temperatures) exacerbate this. Ethylene can arrest flower development and lead to other symptoms like petal drop and bent neck. Closed roses will likely remain closed, and flower food may not help. Make sure your supplier has treated your flowers with an ethylene action inhibitor.

Flower Food

Stage of openness is the primary struggle wedding florists face. Some use unusual methods to coax flowers open, such as placing the stems in warm water or storing the flowers outside the cooler.

In fact, commercial flower food is the most effective tool to help flowers be their best on Saturday. From the moment you unpack the boxes, proper hydration with flower food promotes uptake and bloom opening, building healthier blooms ready for the rigors of outdoor weddings.

Fillers and Foliages

In some shops, foliages and filler

flowers are still in boxes, stored dry in the cooler. It's a common misconception that they don't need the TLC that other cut flowers receive. Fern is hardy, but it's not indestructible. In wind and sun, greens and fillers get stressed like their floral cousins. Again, proper hydration and storage are key. Finishing sprays can also help by acting as antitranspirants.

Storage

Properly nourished and hydrated flowers, stored in a floral refrigerator at 34 F to 38 F, with 75 percent to 85 percent humidity, are most likely to flourish. Avoid temperature fluctuations, and don't forget spacing between buckets and ventilation. Tightly bunched flowers can trap moisture, promoting mold growth and *Botrytis*. A fan can help increase air flow in the cooler, but make sure the fan is not aimed directly at the flowers.

The Day of the Wedding

Keep flowers out of direct sun until the last moment. Hydrate the blooms often, and use a finishing spray to lock in moisture.

Your Moment in the Sun

Your flowers' journey from farm to outdoor wedding venue is long and hazardous, and they are in your care only briefly. The choices you make and the tools you use will determine your flowers' successful performance. It's a performance sure to be noticed by the bride, the guest who goes home with a centerpiece and the bridesmaid scouting florists for some future sunny Saturday! ■

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