

## PREP FLOWERS TO THRIVE AT OUTDOOR EVENTS

> It's Tuesday and the flowers for Saturday's outdoor wedding have arrived. The clock is counting down on the flowers' life. What can you do to not only keep them fresh but also prepare them to withstand the elements of an outdoor wedding?

Time management is critical to ensuring the best flower quality, and the unique demands of outdoor weddings complicate the 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. Here are some tips to make sure the flowers are ready.

### Select Flowers Wisely

It is important to work with a reliable and knowledgeable wholesaler or importer who sources flowers from farms that properly harvest, store and transport flowers. If flowers are harvested at the wrong stage of bloom, or aren't kept in the cold chain, there is often little a florist can do to improve the quality of the flower once it reaches them.

It is also important to counsel wedding clients about the types of flowers that will hold up best for their wedding. You could caution your bride that hydrangea, for instance, or the

ever-thirsty bupleurum, is a bad idea on a hot day. You might suggest one of the interesting new varieties of hardy chrysanthemums or carnations. We all know, however, that the bride wants what she wants. If she insists on a potentially troublesome flower, ask your supplier for the hardiest variety. Some varieties within a flower type can offer advantages when it comes to hydration needs and its ability to withstand heat.

### Beware of Ethylene

Ethylene lurks throughout the flower chain. Many flowers are naturally ethylene sensitive, and improper handling — as well as higher temperatures — exacerbates their sensitivity. Ethylene can halt flower development — as seen in a rose that doesn't open — and lead to other symptoms such as petal drop and a bent neck. It is important to make sure your supplier has treated your flowers with an ethylene action inhibitor.

### Use Flower Food

Getting flowers to open in time for weddings is a primary struggle for wedding florists. Some florists coax flowers open by placing them in warm water or storing them outside the cooler, which shortens their life.

Commercial flower food is the most effective tool to help flowers look their best. From the moment you unpack the boxes of flowers, proper hydration with flower food promotes uptake and encourages the bloom to open, giving you healthier blooms that are ready for the rigors of an outdoor wedding.

### Give Greens TLC

It's a common misconception that greens and fillers don't need the TLC flowers receive. Ferns, while hardy, are not indestructible! Exposed to wind and sun, greens and fillers get stressed just like their floral cousins. Proper hydration and storage are key. Finishing sprays can also help by acting as anti-transpirants.

### Store Flowers Properly

Properly nourished and hydrated flowers, stored in a cooler between 34 and

38°F with 75 to 85 percent humidity, have the best opportunity to flourish. Avoid temperature fluctuations, and don't forget to space out flowers in the cooler and provide 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.

### Prevent Damage

Mishandling flowers results in visible damage, but often the damage isn't evident until much later when flowers are already arranged.

Avoid unsightly brown marks and creases on white petals and other types of damage by handling flowers by their stems. Don't overstuff boxes or buckets so that you must force the flower bunches in and out.

If flowers are packed too tightly while transporting them to the wedding, they will most likely crease or bend which will result in browning at those friction points. Secure flowers during transport so that the blooms do not rub against the cardboard or packaging.

### Offer Protection

Keep flowers out of direct sun, wind and heat until the last possible moment. Keep the bouquets hydrated and use a finishing spray to lock in moisture, especially on flowers that are out of water.

### Take Pride

The flowers' journey from a farm to an 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 the flowers' performance — one that is sure to be noticed by the new couple, the guest who goes home with a centerpiece, and perhaps even a bridesmaid scouting florists for her special day. 🌿

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