

TIPS TO ENSURE LOVELY LILIES

> Since winning Best in Show at the Society of American Florists' Outstanding Varieties Competition in September, our farm, Oregon Flowers, Inc., has seen an increased demand for 'Zelmira', an Oriental hybrid lily that the judges prized for its color. It's the spectacular hue of peach that makes the lily an ideal candidate for focal flowers in summer and fall arrangements and weddings.

Getting 'Zelmira' — or any other lily — from the farm to the consumer requires careful coordination between growers, wholesalers and retailers to ensure the lilies open and color properly and have the longest vase life for the consumer. The most important thing a florist can do is work with their wholesaler or grower to ensure that the lilies are harvested at the right stage and shipped quickly in the cold chain so that florists can better manage the bloom time.

Proper Harvest Stage

Due to their delicate petals, lilies are cut in bud stage, generally when the bud starts to show color. Harvest stage can vary from variety to variety and can change depending on the time of year. Growers try cutting lilies at different bud stages to determine the best harvest stage for each variety. Lilies cut when the buds are too tight won't open properly and might have faded colors. Lilies cut too late are likely to bloom before they reach consumers, even when kept in the cold chain.

Cold Chain Challenges

After we harvest lilies at our farm, they are immediately cooled and dry shipped to customers. Here is where it gets challenging. Lilies must stay in the cold chain to prevent them from opening during transportation. And just like with other fresh flowers, the longer lilies are kept cool, the shorter their vase life, and the more likely that they won't bloom properly.

Florists' Foresight

This is where florists can take it upon themselves to ensure the best product



for their consumers. Work closely with your wholesaler or grower to make sure you are receiving lilies with just enough time to let them start blooming in your shop for use in designs. It can also be helpful for florists to know when the lilies were harvested in order to determine how long they can be held before their appearance and vase life diminishes.

When florists receive lilies, they should recut the stems and place them in water mixed with a flower food specifically for bulb-grown flowers. This will help the flowers begin to open. If the lilies aren't being used right away, dry store the lilies at 36 degrees for a few

days, depending on how much time has passed since they were cut.

When the lilies begin to bloom, be sure to pluck off the stamens, which shed pollen. This is a common complaint about lilies, but the good news is that breeders are developing varieties that have less pollen and even no pollen.

Properly harvested, shipped and cared for, lilies will give consumers up to 10 days of blooms. 🌸

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