

## Top Tips

In a warm summer like the one we've just had, it can be extremely difficult to keep a fresh product in good condition. For flowers in a shop, fluctuations of heat can be challenging and if it's constantly warm, well the best you can do is pull the blinds down and try to shut out the sun. At night, we put sheets over the blinds to block out the evening sun. It's that 'still' heat that's the killer in a flower shop. By that I mean think of your favourite holiday destination, think of the view, imagine yourself sitting there just gazing out on it while you sip on your favourite drink; it's all so still and peaceful and you're a thousand miles away from all your worries. Well, it's that heat that goes for the flowers. What might normally last two to three weeks last one week max. You turn your head and suddenly, all the lilies are starting to open. You come in the next morning and they've all opened up... aaah!

No matter how conscientiously you use the flower food in the shop, it goes cloudier more quickly and that's when you need to change it. It needs to be nice and clear to work. At this point I'll resist the temptation to go into a mini rant about flower food... but please do use it and, please, read the instruction on quantity. Too much and your flowers will open too quickly; too little and they just won't open up correctly – in all probability, they'll just go brown and fall over.

As for your tubs – keep watering them and dead-heading all the spent blooms and brown or yellow leaves. Take out any plants that have had it – go on – chuck them out. Take it from us, they've had it and fill in the space with a new plant.

Now, on an education note as the schools return, customers, if you're into flowers here's seven of our favourite flower websites. Get the coffee out, sit down for an hour or so and get a feel for florists' flowers - they're so different from garden flowers:

1. [www.alexandrafarms.com](http://www.alexandrafarms.com)

Great site for roses, very chatty. They ask people for their thoughts on a new rose. |I sent them my thoughts and the MD sent back a 'thank you'!!

2. [www.delphi-nederpel.nl](http://www.delphi-nederpel.nl)

We bought their delphiniums recently and they were great. Great site for gardeners.

3. [www.paauwlilies.nl](http://www.paauwlilies.nl)

A fresh, crisp site as our web designer would say. We buy their lilies all the time and they are good.

4. [www.rednaomi.com](http://www.rednaomi.com)

Our favourite Valentine's rose. Interesting site to give you a feel of how far these roses travel to you and the extent of growing areas for flowers.

5. [www.royalvanzanten.com](http://www.royalvanzanten.com)

If you ever go to a trade fair, their stand really stands out.

6. [www.molfreesia.nl](http://www.molfreesia.nl)

When you travel by train in the Netherlands, you pass by so many family-run businesses with the glasshouses and processing sheds.

7 [www.vandenbergroses.com](http://www.vandenbergroses.com)

Very interesting site re world-wide production and export of flowers.

Don't be put off by the sites that seem to have glamorous ladies attached to flowers in their introduction. I know some of you are not sure about this but we have noticed this in Dutch flower PR material generally. It's clearly a popular approach but stick with the sites and find out about the flowers as it's really interesting and informative. This is the way we've learned and it keeps us up to date. Note also that the Dutch sites are, understandably in Dutch and, unless your Dutch is up to scratch, you'll need to click on your browser's 'translate' tab or the really interesting stuff will be lost on you.

## **Rosie's Rants**

You might wonder how I have the nerve to rant about anything, given the lovely weather we've had this summer, but days are gradually cooling, rain has made reappearance and life is getting back to normal. Previous rants have tended to emphasise the humorous side of life in a small florist business. But it's not all fun; there's a serious side too, so this time we're talking about running a small retail shop and sharing what it's like from this side of the counter. To get you in the mood, please tick the boxes if you already know the answer:

- Business electricity is more expensive than your domestic bill.
- Business water. We pay business water rates twice yearly. Each business premise, by law, now has a water meter. The average annual bill for our shop is £540.
- Website fee and ongoing maintenance if you're not computer-oriented. In today's world, a website is a must. A while ago, I might have said 'no' but having had one for a while I'd say 'yes, it's a must' – but it has to be refreshed regularly and kept up to date.
- Telephone charges. You really need a landline as well as a website for a shop business. Landlines give the customer a sense of permanence, that you're not a fly-by-night and I myself feel happier calling a landline. An added bonus is it's cheaper.
- A vehicle that moves – no, not a bike – to collect and deliver goods. Commercial insurance is needed for this vehicle and for the shop building and shop contents, and, yes, you've guessed it, commercial insurance is more expensive than private. If you have health and public liability insurance that also adds to the cost.

- Bank charges for a business account are also higher. Don't ever moan about charges for your personal account – okay!!
- Credit card processing – we won't go into too much detail but you would be shocked at the cost. The smaller the business, the more expensive it is, and fraudulent use and the need for heightened security results in even higher charges for processing card transactions.
- Then there are the requests for donations for good causes... Sorry, a small business can only give so much and shop owners have families and pets to feed too.

Perhaps this gives an idea of the overheads before small business operators even open the door to say hello to you. Please remember that shopkeepers in a wee town like Biggar really appreciate your business. Everyone is cutting down on their costs, from making their hair colour last six weeks instead of five, or not having the conditioning treatment they've always had. People are doing their own hair, make-up, corsage and buttonholes for weddings. Who's to blame them? We have a lot of DIY customers and we welcome them too, but wee grocers feel the pinch when customers head for Poundland (guilty as charged, myself!) and filling up with petrol at the big supermarkets doesn't support your local garage. Yet who do you rush off to when the motor is ill?

The local florist may well disappear too, with florists working from garages, home or industrial units making up and delivering internet flower orders. We see an increasing number of vans at the market displaying only mobile numbers (and no address) indicating this is a growing trend in the designer/event florist trade. Perhaps the flower shop preparing the £20 gift of flowers or a small gift of a plant is on the way out.

With that, we'll stop mulling over the serious side of running a small business. We'll be back soon in the autumn with a special issues of 'rants', covering fun stories over the years from Rowan Design archives. Watch out – it could involve you!