

Top Tips

Well, it's nearly summer and everyone is moaning about their plants not doing what they think they should be for this time of year. Boxes are looking bare, pots are looking lost and there are no hanging baskets yet in Biggar or surrounding area. Next door's tulips are only just coming out and the cherry blossom outside the shop is struggling to appear green at all.

Hopefully, some heat will be coming our way in June, according to the forecast so, if you are filling up your tubs, just bite the bullet and buy some 'big' decent-sized plants (instead of these wee plug things or the ones that are buy 30 and get 10 free!) and pot them up in new compost – not stuff you've used before where various beasties will have been living over winter. Break it up with a spade, a bit like making scones (oh dear that's how bad my baking is!) so it's nice and smooth and not lumpy, give it a wee water, leave to settle and absorb the water and come back the next day and get planting. You don't need us to tell you how to plant things, but do free up those roots and nip out some of the plants' growing shoots and you'll get a better show. I'm constantly telling people about this but it's a bit like flower food; it's not working so, oh well, what can you do? I'm not a gardener but our tubs seem to go down so well in the shop.

In the flower line, look out for some nice peonies coming in, in whites, pinks and purples, double and single flowering. Buy at the stage you like them. Once in bloom, you turn round and, ah ha, all the petals have dropped off. But it's a pretty sight! If you do buy in bud, get that spray mister out and mist them daily and, yes, they will start to open slowly. Always try to buy double flowering peonies - they are lovely to watch open up. Look out for double varieties like 'Sarah Bernhardt', 'Karl Rosenfield', 'Shirley Temple' and 'Odile'. 'Odile' is a new creamy coloured one for us in the shop – lovely scent and colour. As the season moves on they get cheaper but always be prepared to pay a bit more for a nice double one.

Nowadays people are wanting more garden-type flowers for their vases. If you look at all these mags on the shelf, it's jugs, jam jars, wee pots, boxes, bean tins etc. full of 'casually' arranged flowers, all colours mixed perfectly – preferably a whole bundle of colours. Becoming popular as a cut flower is 'salvia'. It's in the garden as a perennial and is a sort of flowering sage. It'll be a winner, hopefully. When we get it, it will sell. It's lovely; last ages. Also last year, we mentioned mint as a cut flower, 70 cm in length. Difficult to sell, like the salvia, as it's a bit different but well worth it just for the scent and the beautiful lilac flowers. Long lasting too. But are the public ready for these different flowers? Who knows!! If the mags keep including them it helps but, in a bunch in Tescos, hmmm...difficult. Perhaps not.

Well that's what's new at the moment, so if you do see a flower you like and are not sure of, do tell us and we might be able to tell you more about it or get it in for the summer. Off now to put on my furry slippers as a touch of frost will be with us as May ends.

Rosie's Rants

By popular demand, part 2 of flower delivery stories: some favourite old tales and some new ones; some you might remember from part 1 but are happy to hear again, some we haven't shared with you before, and some accounts of more recent deliveries. The headlines to whet your appetite:

- Archie's famous advice in tricky situations
- Rowan design's last van heads down a steep hill with no one in it.
- Van breaks down outside front entrance of local care home
- Rosie gets pinned against a wall by Max, the Doberman, whose paws are round her neck

- Max the Doberman bites young intruder's bum a week later
- Malky disappointed by reaction to delivery of Valentine's day flowers
- 2013 Mother's Day – mums waiting for flowers and pretending they're not
- Rosie meets charming old lady who teaches her not to sweat the small stuff

Okay, here goes...

Archie's advice, he's our [intrepid delivery driver](#), is this: if the situation looks at all dodgy, stay put in the vehicle, toot the horn loudly and await help. If no answer, drive off and return and repeat the procedure if it still looks unsafe. By unsafe, he means dogs, strange people, wandering animals, mud and glore, etc.

A few years ago, our last van did start to roll down a hill in Biggar. Our intrepid delivery drivers were delivering Mother's Day flowers on foot when one of them suddenly saw the wee motor start to make its own way down the hill. The handbrake was always a bit dodgy. The ladies ran after it and managed to secure it and all was well. They then returned to the shop and told me. At that point, I said, 'Tell me no more! Are you okay? Is the van okay? Nothing damaged? Fine, thanks!'

Yes, the van did break down outside the main entrance to the Care Home. Well, the steering lock had a certain way with it and if you stopped, turned off the engine and took the key out, there was a trick to unlocking the steering again (which was why it was never locked). Our happy helpers were delivering again and two of them tried but had no luck. Solution, helpers returned and gave me a lift to the scene of the crime. I started the van, then returned to the shop. The helpers continued with deliveries but they'd learned their lesson and kept the engine running until all the Mother's Day flowers had been delivered.

Max the Doberman was a nice chap. He had a huge grey/black coat and he liked my old dog, Meg, and knew us when we walked by. Without really thinking, I banged the outside gate but got no reply. I heard Max barking so in I went with the flowers and out came Max at top speed. Muttering 'hello' in my best doggy-friendly voice, I backed off. Max leapt up, put his paws round my shoulders and pinned me against the wall with the flowers dangling from my outstretched arm. A moment later, just as I was beginning to get a bit worried, Max's owner arrived. All was well... in the end!

A week later, news reached us on the grape-vine that Max had bitten a young intruder who'd come into the garden looking for his lost football. As he exited over the garden shed, Max had bitten him on the bum!

Valentine's Day is always a hit or a miss on the romance side. People may be over the moon with their flowers or some years it's just an 'Oh thanks' or even 'Oh' and bang goes the door. We try and explain this to the helpers but they get all excited by the event. We told [Malky](#) but he didn't really believe it possible. On returning from a few walking deliveries on Valentine's Day, he was most put out by some of the responses. Maybe some recipients are expecting a larger bunch, or different flowers, who knows? It's a bit of a minefield. This year, we told Archie to give them a smile and a bit of chat/charm, so off he went and we had lots of compliments like: 'Eh, who was that old guy delivering for you? He's quite funny!'

Mother's Day 2013 was very busy. It's a two or three person job on Sundays: one in the shop and one or two delivering. Some people like an 8am or 8.30am delivery so they know the flowers are there and then they can phone their mum. The next delivery is at 10am, after breakfast and these mums are waiting for their flowers. You just know it as they sort of keek out the side window to see

who's there or they're positioned at the window casually reading the paper, waiting for the car to pull up and get the bunch of flowers out.

Finally a lesson for all of us all but more about life than deliveries. On a delivery to a sheltered housing flat in Biggar with an arrangement from an order that I had taken and written the card for, I banged on the door. The nameplate said Miss XXX but I looked at the card and it said Mrs XXX. Oh no, I thought, I've made a mistake! The golden rule in this business is to write the message and the envelope clearly, making sure there's no spelling mistakes. We do not add anything extra, do not underline or add any fancy embellishment. The message hasn't come from us and must be written exactly as the sender intended.

The lady came to the door slowly as if she had just had an operation. All I could think was 'I bet she's an ex-schoolteacher! Oh well, whatever, I have to confess I made a mistake.' So I owned up and admitted I was the one who had written the envelope and I was sorry, to which she said 'Oh, how nice! I like being called Mrs. Well, I've a lot more to do with my time than moan about something like that.'

Finally, in this day and age, people think we are like TNT deliverers or Parcelforce. What, when, how, what if they're not in, they ask about the delivery. Fair enough, you might say but, come on; we're not Argos where you can book delivery space. We are a wee shop but we do our best. We can do an early morning run, a lunchtime delivery or one after 5pm and we can do Sundays if we are there. All good, but after 5pm is the most difficult, perhaps not for the sender who thinks it's great to get the flowers delivered then but not so at times. This is because a lot of people get home and:

- let the dog out (not Max hopefully)
- get the furry slippers with the holes in them and the old jacket on
- get the kettle on
- get the wine out
- fall asleep in front of the TV, watching football highlights
- get into an argument with someone else in the house
- hang up the washing (and we've seen some strange washing lines over the years)
- have a fight with a lawnmower which has decided to pack in

The list goes on and on and then I arrive, clutching a bunch of flowers, banging on the door (as the doorbell doesn't work). I head round to the back of the house and meet with one or all of the above. I'm wearing the obligatory Rowan Design Fleece', even in the height of summer. It's easier. They read the name and don't think you're as strange as they first thought and that's it. Who knows what you might bump into or disturb. The quicker you get out the better and away home for some peace but let's hope no one's delivering to my house till tomorrow morning!

See you soon, whether at your front or back door! And the message from this is please, please show these people some compassion when they arrive with your flowers - it's not as easy as it looks!