

## TOP TIPS

Last year we went on about bulb gifts. Well, we're still going on about them – and we have even more in the shop for you to choose from this year. They're perfect for any type of house, cold or warm - it's just that in a warm house, they'll open up more quickly!

New this year is an amaryllis bulb covered in a wax seal, so you don't have to water it at all; it just grows and produces some lovely blooms. They come in all shapes and colours and containers, so imagine that for a gift: no water, no hassle, no problem...

Our wreath-makers are busy producing our usual fun door decorations. Popular with them, colour-wise, are golds and greens, deep red (with roses) gold, oranges and greens and, yes, 'Barbie' colours. We love the pink, maroon, silver and white –wow!!!

There's lots of really interesting greenery/leaves/plant materials around this year. Grab a good quality silver, copper, gold or white spray(i.e. not from the Poundshop or with Hammerite), mix and match the colours, and bingo – you've a fun-filled vase ready. Then add a couple of stems of amaryllis, lily or carnations and there you are, sorted inexpensively - and it looks great.

Instead of the usual chocs, bottle of wine, box of biscuits which all come on special offer (and everyone knows about but pretends not to) why not choose a small flower gift? We have a lovely selection. See our collage of nice gifts currently available. They constantly change too, depending on the fun items or pretty things we manage to source.

## Rosie's Rants

In the last set of rants, we promised to reveal some Christmas stories from the shop – and some secrets...

First off – who ate the chocolate gingerbread house that a customer kindly gave us last year? It arrived beautifully wrapped in cellophane, so everyone could see it was a work of art. Our bunch of helpers looked at it, turned it round, admired it, praised it, pawed it, put it up on a shelf, brought it down again and repeated all of the above over and over, but still no one dared open it up and eat it. Various visitors to the shop did likewise, but no one touched it.

Ah-ha, I thought, this will not last – they're a hungry lot – and I was right! I was in Glasgow to collect flowers from the market and Carolyn was looking after the shop. I brought the goods in and only then noticed the cellophane had been disturbed and the house now had no roof. I raised an eyebrow and Carolyn said, 'Och, it was too much for me. I was fed up looking at it - it had to be eaten.' The next day, Malky arrived and was quite put out that it had been opened and the roof had disappeared but then he got stuck into the walls, with Carolyn polishing off the foundations. All that was left were a few end bits, or bricks, and the robin that had sat on the roof. One regular customer who enjoys the Christmas food on offer in the shop was dismayed to discover the house had gone. 'Oh well,' he said, and that was the end of the robin and the bricks.

Archie does like a slice (and I mean a slab) of Christmas cake after he completes his round of deliveries. Our helpers all cut wee thin bits but Archie pushes these away, grabs the knife and gets cutting. And the best in his opinion is... from 'a famous high street store', fully iced cake, right down

all the sides – mmm, tasty. If it's not up to standard, sorry other suppliers, it goes straight back in the box and that's it. Archie would rather go without.

Then there's Malky... In the middle of a really busy day at the shop, Malky is distracted by a text informing him that the 'brussels' (organic, of course!) he had sourced were rotten and wouldn't be available for his Christmas dinner. As we know from our customers, if the sprouts, chipolatas, ice cream, cranberry sauce, etc are just not right, stress levels run high so this was a major calamity. All's well that ends well, however, as he headed down to the 'fruit and veg' shop in the town, and managed to get replacements. Whew!!!

Shop protocol says the front shop should be tidy and the floor clean. After another trip to the market on a particularly damp, wet day, I returned to find the shop floor covered (and I mean covered) with muddy wellie prints. They were posh wellie prints, not the kind you get from regular black Dunlops. On the floor above, our rugby playing neighbours from New Zealand were doing a traditional war dance, while their Y-fronts were strung along the curtain poles at the window just above the shop front. Meanwhile Carolyn was in the back, tucking into another tasty treat. Happy days!

Over the years, I have had ongoing problems with the wrong plants being delivered. Because we're usually the last delivery before the driver heads back to the market, you would think whatever's in the van must be for us. But alas, we end up with Kirsty from Kilmarnock's order. She, meanwhile, has realised she's got someone else's stuff but no one knows who's got hers till the end of the run. Last year, we kept getting the wrong plants and then the redelivery was also wrong. Once, these huge, multiple-axled, articulated Dutch lorries arrived. The drivers quickly wheeled out huge six or seven foot trolleys and left. Then the local delivery guys and ladies looked for what they were meant to deliver, fired them into a van, put the foot down and headed off. It might have been fun to watch – just as long as you weren't the recipient! Bear in mind those delivery people cover a massive area and they too are wanting to get home to hang up their stockings.

And it's not just the delivery people who get things mixed up. We get quite a few individual orders to design specific decorations for the festive season. Customers drop off their own accessories and we add these to the designs we make up. All good, we put them in the 'aside for orders' box. But I'm the world's worst for forgetting what baubles are for whom. Yes, you say, they should be bagged and labelled, but sometimes in the hustle and bustle you can forget. Needless to say, I look in the box and wonder, 'What's this for? Don't remember...' and stick it under a decoration for someone else. So yes, you've guessed it, some smart chat is needed to get out of that predicament. I should learn from my mistakes - but do I ever? Time will tell...

And with that, thanks for your interest in our shop and what goes on here. Thanks also for your complimentary comments about our website. We look forward as ever to seeing you and chatting with you over the festive season. That's it for 2013!

Who knows what will happen in 2014?