

Sorry we haven't been back sooner after the Christmas season. This time you'll find the rants mixed in with the tips as we bring you some thoughts covering Valentines Day and the on-set of Spring – yes Spring, when it gets that wee bit brighter on the way home.

But first, February brings Valentines Day to the shop. It lands on a Friday this year. We got an excited email from one of our suppliers declaring that it's going to be the busiest Valentines Day for a while (sounds good!) BECAUSE IT FALLS ON A FRIDAY. Why should the day matter? Maybe he was forgetting about those of us in country places and thinking only about city shops. By linking the hectic activity around Valentines Day with a particular day of the week, he was perhaps imagining people working in the city and buying flowers on their way home, not ordering from their local shop. If Valentines Day falls on a Saturday or a Sunday, are home shops on to a winner? See what I mean? We'll have to wait and see...

This year we've got a whole bundle of picture frames and we've inserted daft pictures and equally fun sayings. From pictures of animals (some of our own and customers') to posh handbags, perfume, 'hot' people and others, well, not so 'hot'. There'll be something for everyone. Watch out for the window display sometime soon.

Top tips on Valentines flowers? Again, we can only advise you to buy what you can afford and not to go overboard - it could lead to disappointment. If the budget can't stretch to a whole load of goodies (the bear, the chocs, the perfume, the meal, the handbag, etc.) go for a lovely long-stemmed single rose, nicely gift-wrapped. Keep it simple, guys and dolls, we say...

If you browse websites nowadays, you can be captivated by the names of different roses. There are SO many, and people say 'I want a so-and-so named rose. Then you start discussing the characteristics of that variety and it quickly becomes apparent that they've only seen it advertised, never up close or in reality. Every rose has its own way of opening up (or not!). And it's not just the colour of the bloom that varies, or its place of origin. The length of stem will be different, the size of head, vase life. Some even have more thorns than others,

Nowadays it's an open market for florists, as they pack away the Christmas tree and lights...Here we'll digress for a moment and reveal that [Archie](#), our delivery 'boy' always tells us it's time, and that's it – I pack the whole thing up, decorations, lights, tree, and it's back in the loft for another year ready to whip next Christmas:

'Hey Arch,' we say, 'do you no' re-arrange the baubles?'

'Eh? What? No, it's fine as it is!'

Maybe that way of thinking's the secret to a happy, long life ...

But back to the roses – popular at the moment are:

- Freedom Rose, from Ecuador - bright red, long head, anticipated vase life 10 days;
- Grand Prix, from the Netherlands - large head, deep red velvet. It sometimes comes dyed black, hence people asking for a 'black' rose. Nice too, but the foliage is put under a wee bit of pressure during the dying process. Opens quickly with a vase life of 8 days.
- Red Sky, from Ethiopia - small-head, bright red, opens quickly, vase life around 8 days

- Red Naomi, from the Netherlands - large head, soft velvet petals, deep red and scented (very subtle but lovely). It's the kind of rose you just have to sniff every time you pass it. Even when you're delivering them you're standing you're thinking, 'These smell lovely...' Opens up nicely and just sort of sits there. Vase life 12 days. Customers report this rose dries well in a vase.
- Upper Class, from Kenya - reliable, large, red velvet rose. Nice, opens slowly. Vase life 8 days.
- Hot Blood, also from Kenya - bright red, very few thorns. Vase life 10 days.

Those are the main contenders among the reds. But there's also some lovely coloured roses which come in all shades. Some have an old-fashioned'/vintage appearance and look as though they're going brown at the edges, but it's just the way they are. We have to keep telling customers this too. They're really nice and it's like going for a walk in a garden when you see one of these roses.

At this point I have to say I'm not going to tell you how to look after your roses simply because, after many years of trying, I've given up. If my pals won't listen to me, no one will. I will stress that everyone here in the shop is absolutely excellent at keeping roses and they know exactly what to do with them, but after 17 years of trying to spread the word, I've decided to shut up.

Oh dear, that looks like the first rant of the year! In fact it's the second - the year is a month old, after all and you'd expect nothing less! This year, we're putting Tips and Rants together for a change and, as we begin a new year, we thought we'd let you into a secret. Our Tips and Rants are checked over by a mystery adviser whose identity will remain hidden. We just need to admit it's thanks to him/her that our thoughts come across more clearly, because although we know we're great with flowers, we might not have the same talent in the 'words' department.

The first rant of the year crept into a conversation with our 'ghost writer' and concerned 'women of a certain age' sometimes having to tread carefully because some younger people (not all, of course!) have a habit of speaking down to us 'oldies'. It might be in a shop, a health centre, dentist, hairdresser, or simply while out and about - if you're in the same 'certain gender/certain age' category, you'll recognise the syndrome.

So, what's our message for any 'young yins' wanting to find out more about flowers? Simply, don't mistake us for 'has-beens' overlooking the knowledge and experience we have. We may look a bit 'vintage', just like the roses with the crumpled brown edges mentioned earlier but, like them, we also have a charm all of our own!

Happy Valentines Day! May it bring all you wish for and more...