

Perfect Pair for Valentine's Day: Roses and Lemon-Lime Soda

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Roses by the dozen are delivered to sweethearts across the nation on Valentine's Day. On Feb. 14 more than 150 million long-stemmed roses will be delivered to significant others. The meaningful gesture soon wilts, but according to a University of Missouri horticulturist some lemon-lime soda could breathe extra life into the beautiful bunch.

Florists sometimes include preservatives with the purchase of roses. If not, a homemade preservative for long-lasting, sweet-smelling roses can be made by mixing 12 ounces of lemon-lime soda (regular, not diet), 12 ounces of water and a half a teaspoon of bleach or mouthwash. For hard water, a drop of dishwashing liquid should be added to the solution.

"Any brand of lemon-lime soda will work," said David Trinklein, associate professor of horticulture in the MU College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Sciences. "The soda has sugar that feeds the plant and acid that works to lower the pH level. The bleach or mouthwash works to kill bacteria. One drop of dishwashing liquid is enough. It works to break down the polarity of the water - to make it slicker so it translocates inside the tissue."

Water uptake is vital in order to keep roses fresh. Bacteria are the chief culprits hindering that process. Leaves harbor bacteria so it is important to remove any leaves that may be under water, according to Trinklein.

"Hold the base of the stem under water and make a diagonal cut about one inch from the end with a sharp knife or shears," Trinklein suggests.

"If this is not done under the water, the stem will take in air which will create blockage."

Roses require a lot of water. It is a good idea to make sure the vase is full and add water often along with the homemade preservative mixture. Premature wilting does not mean the roses are old, just that they are no longer taking water. Re-cutting the stem may help the roses begin to take water again. Choose a cool area away from direct sunlight to display fresh-cut roses.

"There is a limit to how long any cut flower will last, but you can extend that time by providing roses with proper care," Trinklein said.

Source: University of Missouri.

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