

# **Are You Ready To Exhibit.....Conditioning Your Roses**

## **By: Richard Anthony & Kristine Vance**

Conditioning of roses is nothing more than adding something to the water the roses are stored in to insure that the cut roses will last as long as possible (or at least until they are judged at the rose show). Obviously, some roses will last longer than others but this is something that you will learn as you become more familiar with your roses and how they react to refrigeration. For now, we want to concentrate on what to add to the water and why. We are going to examine **Floral Preservatives, Floral Conditioners, Bleach, Lemon Juice and Citric Soda.**

All of the five named conditioners work; often it is a matter of preference as to what to use and why. **Floral Preservatives** such as **Floralife** contains a **sugar** product that feeds the rose under refrigeration, a **bactericide** which will control bacteria and an **acidifier** which will lower the **pH** down to around 4.0 pH. If your rose is somewhat tight and needs to open a tad this product may work for you assuming the rose has a few days under refrigeration. We use this but it is not our product of choice; we use it because it was a “giveaway” at a rose show some time ago and will use it when we want to open a tight rose slowly.

**Floral Conditioners** such as the **Chrysal** products were initially developed to aid rose growers and florists to rehydrate cut blooms that were shipped to wholesalers out of water. Most floral conditioners contain three ingredients; a **bactericide** which will eliminate or reduce bacteria, some type of **acidifier** which will lower the pH of the water and a chemical which helps or assists with the uptake of water through the stem of the rose. Care must be taken **not** to condition your roses for a prolonged period of time if the roses are not refrigerated as damage to your roses will result. Ironically this will not occur if the roses are refrigerated. We prefer Chrysal RVB if we are driving some distance to an out of town show. The draw back with using a Chrysal product is that you can not take a stem from the vase after the show and attempt to root it as for some reason it will not take. M. J. Bailey recently advised that you can use the bud-eyes to successfully bud with but concurs that rooting a stem that was conditioned in Chrysal as a wasted effort. The primary difference between a Floral Preservative and a Floral Conditioner is the conditioner does not contain any beneficial nutrients which can benefit roses than need to continue to develop after they were cut.

**Bleach** is a good choice for conditioning roses especially when combined with vinegar as it is readily available and cost effective. The bleach used at a rate of about one ounce to one gallon of water will effectively kill most bacteria that are in the water and the vinegar will lower the pH to acceptable levels when used at the rate of one to two ounces per gallon of water. We also recommend that a comparable solution of bleach water be used to disinfect your refrigerator/cooler and all storage containers each time you intend to use them. This will go a long way toward insuring your roses make it to the show as you intended without **Barbara Bacteria** making her presence felt.

**Lemon Juice** purchased at most any grocery store is our conditioner of choice for local rose shows. It is cost effective, lowers the pH, feeds the rose slightly and has worked well for us for a very long time. We typically place our cut miniature and miniflora roses in 16 ounce cups and will add one good squirt of lemon juice per cup. We store our cut large roses in 24 inch high waste baskets; we use an estimated two ounces to about twelve inches of water per waste basket. We also will change the water every other day and re-cut about one half inch of each stem. Cups are often recycled after each rose show but if reused they are rinsed in a mild bleach solution before being used a second or third time.

**Citric Soda** is a preferred choice of some old time exhibitors. Mountain Dew would be a good choice to consider. We have not experimented using citric soda but can recall hearing Warren Knopp of the Columbiana Rose Society tell how he'd keep a rose for nearly a week using the soda mixed with water without the benefit of refrigeration.

The long and short of it is that all five products work as a conditioner and are beneficial in maintaining your roses prior to the rose show. The choice of what to use and when is really up to the exhibitor. Keep in mind that some roses such as '**Brandy**' just do not refrigerate very well and other roses such as '**Mister Lincoln**' will experience bluing which obviously will be detrimental to winning at the rose show. Some roses such as '**Moonstone**' will last a long time in the cooler. A rule of thumb is that the longer a rose will last on the bush the better the rose will refrigerate. We have had success with roses that were cut on Sunday for the following Saturday's show but this is by far the exception and not the rule. Generally three days is a good rule of thumb to consider for refrigerating roses with five days being the outer limit for a rose to hold.

As always if you have questions regarding this or other articles that we have written please direct your inquiry to either Richard at [RJA4CPA@aol.com](mailto:RJA4CPA@aol.com) or Kristine at [Beancnr30@wideopenwest.com](mailto:Beancnr30@wideopenwest.com).