

Focus on green flower arranging

As nature lovers, none of us wants our favourite pastime to adversely affect the environment. **Hannah Dunne** looks at nine factors every flower arranger should consider with suggestions for what you can do to be more green

1 TRANSPORT Around 85% of flowers bought in the UK are imported from overseas, particularly the Netherlands as well as countries near the equator in South America and sub-Saharan Africa. They mostly travel by plane and refrigerated truck, producing CO₂ emissions along the way.

2 WORKER WELFARE As with bananas and coffee, we import flowers from developing areas of the world. Rural farms provide valuable employment for disadvantaged communities, but a small chunk still exploit their land and staff. Farm welfare issues include poor wages and working conditions, hygiene, health due to handling of chemicals, and gender – since 80% of the global flower-growing workforce are women.

3 PACKAGING AND DECORATION Non-recyclable plastics such as cellophane, card picks, cable ties, glitter, decorative accessories, bags and containers are used in abundance by the flower trade.

4 FLOWER FOOD This is generally a positive thing because it helps to improve flower quality and lengthen vase-life which, in turn, minimises waste and lessens impact on the planet. But for consumers, flower food is sold with every bunch in wasteful single-use sachets usually made of foil or plastic.



5 FLORAL FOAM Research has shown that floral foam contributes to the world's microplastic problem as it can be ingested by aquatic animals; it isn't recyclable and doesn't biodegrade.



Foam inside the digestive tract of a freshwater crustacean

6 CHEMICALS In battling pests and disease, commercially-grown flowers are often treated with agrochemicals such as fertiliser and pesticides. If used irresponsibly, they can have a dangerous effect on the planet and people. Fertiliser and pesticides for use in your own cut flower garden may also pollute the air, water and ground.

7 ENERGY Artificial light, heat and cooling is required to run many high-tech, large-scale commercial greenhouses in the Netherlands and around Europe, including the UK. In short, this uses energy to create the perfect growing conditions that naturally occur near the Equator.

8 WATER Millions of gallons of fresh water are used – and often wasted – in the flower production process at farms as well as throughout the supply chain, in shops and homes.

9 WASTE Like the milk in your fridge, flowers are highly perishable, they're also delicate and prone to disease which means the flower industry's 'scrap rate' is high. Every flower scrapped because it wasn't used or sold is a strain on the planet's resources. Add in the plastics mentioned above, and this can become a highly wasteful hobby.

Photographs: © iStock.com/scannell (globe); courtesy of Charlene Trestrail, RMIT University PhD Researcher (freshwater crustacean)

Now, here's how you can keep it green

When buying flowers

Buy locally grown flowers; in summer this is easy thanks to the *Flowers from the Farm* network. You can also grow your own, forage, and seek-out florists who promote their green credentials.

When this isn't possible, shop consciously by looking for flowers stamped with labels which promise ethical standards at farms, or ask your florist to source them. Some are environmental – assessing factors like energy, pesticide and water use. These include 'GlobalG.A.P' and 'MPS' for imported blooms, and 'BOPP' for British-grown flowers.

Other labels are socially-focused, regulating conditions at farms in developing countries to maintain a good level of worker welfare. Often, these initiatives are also involved in outreach projects like support for local schools in poor rural areas. Common names to look out for are 'Fairtrade' and 'Rainforest Alliance', plus some retailers run their own, such as the Waitrose Foundation.

When arranging flowers

Avoid plastic packaging and add-ons wherever possible; much of it is unnecessary. Look for alternatives like biodegradable cellophane, and always pick paper over plastic. Watch out for innovative eco products regularly being launched, such as bio-glitter and OASIS® NATUREBASE® shapes.

What is NATUREBASE®

NATUREBASE® Bio Floral Foam are a range of shaped compostable bases with floral foam that are kinder to the environment. The base part will compost in six months in industrial composting conditions while the foam biodegrades 91% in 1,100 days in biologically active landfill conditions. The rate and extent shown do not mean that the product will continue to decompose.



The 'no floral foam' movement has gathered real momentum online, follow @nofloralfoam on Instagram for alternative techniques. Look at going foam-free as an opportunity to get creative with design concepts such as cleverly placed vases, moss, twigs, wire, floral frogs, water phials and test tubes. Meanwhile, leading foam manufacturers are working hard to find solutions, and are regularly publicising updates.

Keep an eye on your water usage and make the most of flower food. FloraLife now produces a post-harvest solution so cut flowers can

travel more healthily. For the home, FloraLife also sells flower food that keeps the water in your flower vases fresher for longer in recyclable paper sachets or in bottles made from PET that you can rinse and recycle in your recycling bins. Chrysal, meanwhile, sells its flower food in industrially compostable sachets.

Finally, try to avoid waste by using long-lasting flowers, and shop thoughtfully. Some florists sell cheaper vases of off-cuts that would otherwise go to waste, or you could try arranging with living plants, for instance by wiring bulbs into wreaths.

Photograph: Oliver Gordon