

The latest arrival in the craze for succulents: colorful, long-lasting cut kalanchoe.

Yes, kalanchoes—those attractive and durable flowering plants you’ve been selling for years, perhaps tucking them into “European gardens”, even cutting snippets for bright accents in bridal bouquets and other special designs—are classified botanically as succulents.

And yes, they are now being grown, harvested, and marketed as cut flowers. As such—just like other succulents—they are among the longest-lasting cut materials you can find. The typical vase life is a minimum of three weeks!

First, a reminder: a succulent plant is one that has adapted to a hot, dry environment by storing water in its thick, fleshy leaves. Succulents pop up in many botanical orders and plant families. But kalanchoes belong to the family Crassulaceae, which consists entirely of succulents and also includes such familiar genera as echeveria and sempervivum, with their flowerlike rosettes.

Photos accompanying this article are courtesy of Danziger, www.danziger.co.il.



fresh focus kalanchoe

Besides storing water in their leaves, members of this family have another strategy that helps them thrive in hot, dry conditions: “Crassulacean acid metabolism,” or CAM, which helps prevent water loss from transpiration during the hottest part of the day.

Some years ago, the Danish cut-flower breeder Queen® Cutflowers began to select and develop ethylene-tolerant varieties of kalanchoe for the cut-flower market. In 2015, the Israeli global breeder and marketer Danziger gained the rights to promote these new varieties. Among their remarkable benefits, the cut stems have a natural antiseptic property (possibly related to CAM) that helps to keep the water clean in buckets where they are stored.

SOME LIKE IT JUST COOL-ISH The new cut kalanchoes are available year-round in six basic colors: white, yellow, orange, red, pink, and rose or light pink. New varieties are still being developed, with subtle color variations. Grown for the U.S. market mostly in Colombia and Ecuador, they have recently been added to the assortment available from California grower Sun Valley Floral Farms.

When bunches of cut kalanchoes arrive in the shop, you’re likely to see a warning on the sleeve: **DO NOT REFRIGERATE**. Native to the tropics, kalanchoes do best at temperatures similar to those preferred by most humans: between roughly 55 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit (12 to 30 Celsius). The optimal storage temp would be 55 to 60.

While you might associate kalanchoe plants with rather short stems, the new varieties bred and grown as cuts offer significant stem length—typically about 60 centimeters, or two feet. The stems are also quite strong—important given the weight of the succulent leaves and flowers.

Of course, you could always take kalanchoe cuttings from a houseplant. But with cut flowers like these available, why would you? See our sidebar on the opposite page for thoughts on when to buy cuts and when to cut your own. 🌿



WARM AND BRIGHT Cut kalanchoes come in rich, saturated colors along with some softer tints. The new long-stemmed, large-flowering, ethylene-tolerant varieties from Danziger include six color groups: white, yellow, orange, red, pink, and light pink (rose). They serve well as accent flowers, but different colors of cut kalanchoes can also be combined to make a monofloral bouquet. Being diminutive and long-lasting out of water, they are exceptionally useful for boutonnieres and other body flowers.

DO YOU KEEP AN ivy plant with extra-long vines in your shop and snip off one or two of these occasionally to wrap a bundle of stems, or weave across the top of a bouquet? Or maybe you've been known to go outside and steal a branch of camellia—your own, of course, or with a neighbor's permission!—for an ikebana-style design. Everyone loves floral designs with a garden look—and how better to get that look than with accent materials culled from a real garden?

Practices like these are becoming more popular than ever with florists who strive for a distinctive, signature style. Indeed, "flower foraging" has been touted as a trend; a new book, *Foraged Flower Arranging*, promotes the practice for do-it-yourself consumers.

Professional florists can take advantage of the trend, while exercising due caution. Among the factors to consider, how do you know that such materials will hold up? "If it's something I haven't worked with before, I test it out first in the shop," says Teleflora Education Specialist Helen Miller AIFD of Flowers and Such in Adrian, Michigan. One of Helen's favorites is flowering sedum—another succulent in the Crassulaceae family, like kalanchoe. It's available from specialty cut-flower suppliers, but Helen finds it easier and more economi-

Cutting your own flowers & foliage can add freshness & flair to your designs. But when & how?



cal to grow it in her garden. "It starts out green, then turns mauve or dark pink, depending on the variety, and in the fall, it turns to a bronze or rust color and dries nicely," she reports. "You can also spray the dried flower with Design Master color spray."

"With some materials it's important to cut at the right stage," Helen advises. She cuts her own Michigan peonies, in season, taking care to cut them in fairly tight bud. She harvests zinnias "before the pollen comes out." A big fan of unusual foliage in design, Helen also keeps and cuts Xanadu philodendrons, spotted crotons, and hostas. "Hostas are getting to be a real trend," she notes. "They come in so many shapes and sizes. We have some that stand more than two feet tall." Herb gardens also are popular as a source of cut material like rosemary and mint.

One thing to be mindful of is to do research on any plants that grow wild and might be protected species, she notes. Helen cuts a variety of bittersweet with tiny buds and hardy tendrils and uses it throughout the summer in bridal bouquets, then dries it in the fall. She has bushes of that variety that are available to her—but there is another, older variety that is a protected species in Michigan. Any possible toxicity is another area for research and awareness.

You'll always want to rely on professional, commercial sources of supply for the bulk of your fresh-flower and -foliage inventory, but for accent materials and seasonal variety, "foraging"—whether outdoors or in your own shop or greenhouse—can be a creative option.