

Imported flowers are cut, packed and transported across borders before they reach your florist, often passing through several sets of hands. Along the way, growers, freight handlers and distributors work to protect the flowers from heat, damage and delays, while shipments may also be inspected for pests and plant diseases.

From the field to the flight

The journey begins at a flower farm, where stems are harvested at a stage suited to the flower and its destination. Some are cut while their buds are still fairly closed, so they have time to open after transport. The right stage varies: a rose and a fully open sunflower do not travel in quite the same way.

After cutting, workers sort stems by qualities such as length and appearance. They may remove some foliage, bunch the flowers and place them in water or a treatment solution. The stems are then packed to help prevent bruising and movement. Depending on the route and the flower, they may travel in boxes without water or in containers that hold water.

Many cut flowers are cooled soon after harvest. Lower temperatures can slow ageing and reduce water loss, but not every flower likes the same conditions. Some tropical flowers can suffer damage if they get too cold, so their handling needs are different.

The journey across borders

Flowers may travel by air, road or sea, depending on the distance, timing and shipment. A box can move from a farm to a packing facility, an airport or port, and then through a distribution centre. At each transfer, good handling matters: even a short spell in excessive heat can shorten the life of some flowers.

1. Flowers are harvested, sorted and packed for the journey.
2. They are transported, with temperature controls suited to the flowers and route.
3. Documents are checked, and authorities may inspect the shipment for pests or disease.
4. A distributor or wholesaler receives the flowers and sends them onward to florists.

Import rules differ by country and by plant. Shipments may need a certificate confirming that they meet plant health requirements. If inspectors find a problem, flowers can be delayed, treated, refused entry or destroyed, depending on the rules and the issue.

Getting ready for your florist

Once flowers reach a wholesaler or florist, staff may unpack the bunches, trim the stems and put them in clean water. This gives dry packed flowers a chance to take up water again. They may also remove damaged leaves or petals and sort the stems for sale.

Your florist then stores and prepares the flowers for arrangements. The condition you see in a bouquet reflects more than the flight or drive: harvest timing, packing, temperature and care after arrival all play a part.

If you want to know how to help your flowers last, ask your florist about the particular stems you are taking home. A fresh cut, clean water and a suitable spot away from heat are useful starting points for many cut flowers.

A good companion read: set flowers guide