

Here's How To Extend Life Of Cut Roses

By **LOU PAVLOVICH**

The Rose Society of Tucson

After you have grown roses for a few years, it sinks in that cut roses only last a few days in the house before they blow open and ultimately wilt.

Therefore, it is important to learn how you can maximize the duration of cut blooms.

Over the years, Diane and I learned how to extend the life of roses 7-14 days after they have been cut. Some varieties last longer than others.

Sharpen Shears & Disinfect Them

The first step is purchasing high quality pruning shears with scissor action. I purchased the Felco Model 2 nearly 40 years ago, and it was the best decision I ever made. The Swiss shears are made with precision, and I don't anticipate ever replacing it. They cost \$54.79 at A.M. Leonard on the internet. Go to: www.amleo.com A.M. Leonard also sells their Leonard Traditional Bypass Pruners with a 1-inch cutting capacity for \$35.64. It is nearly identical to the Felco shears but \$20 cheaper. It comes with a lifetime warranty, and I wouldn't hesitate purchasing this tool.



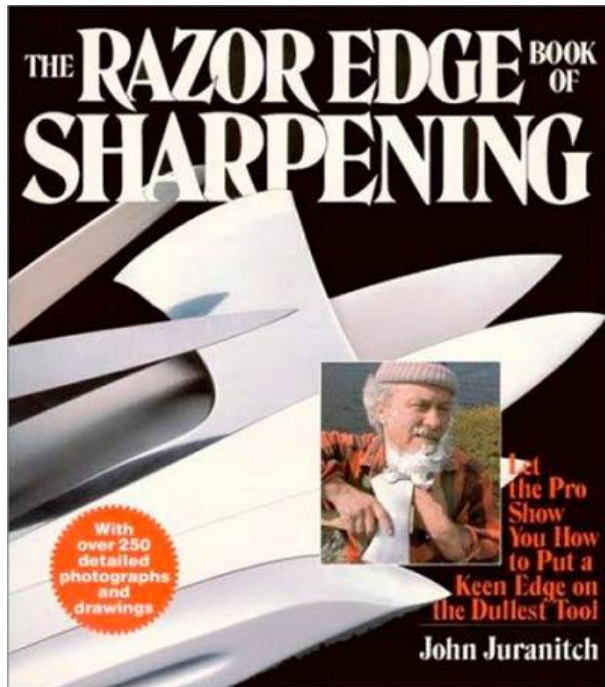
Felco No. 2 Pruning Shears

DO NOT purchase anvil type pruning shears where the blade crashes into steel. They typically crush the rose stem and are terrible tools. Don't waste your money.

Now that you have high quality shears, I highly encourage you to sharpen your pruning shears prior to big bloom cycles. I learned 38 years ago how to sharpen the blades of my Felco No. 2 shears from the ultimate authority on the subject, John Juranitch. This gentleman set the Guinness World Record by sharpening a dull ax and shaving his face with the razor sharp edge in a world record time of 14 minutes.

He came out with a book in 1985 which delved into his double edge sharpening system called *The Razor Edge Book Of Sharpening*. After reading his book, I purchased the **Deluxe Professional Kit** from his company at www.razoredgesystems.com

It contains a 6" coarse and super ultrafine hone (6" x 2" x 1/2"), the **Razor Edge Guide** for blades longer than 3 1/2", the **Cub Guide** for blades 3 1/2" and shorter, the pocket size **Raz-R-Steel** for maintaining your edges and **Edge Tester** to instantly determine edge perfection. These components are all contained in a hard-sided carrying case.



When I received it, I took apart my Felco shears and sharpened the blade. It was so sharp that the blade edge cut hair off my arm! I kid you not. The other key was making sure the blade edge was smooth. It had to be silky smooth and razor sharp. Then I put grease in the pivot areas and put it back together with perfect tension.

Next, use a cotton ball soaked in 91% Isopropyl Alcohol to disinfect the blades of your shears. I learned many years ago as a boy what a great cleaning and sterilizing solution Isopropyl Alcohol is. My mom used an IBM Executive typewriter in those days as an accountant. It was cleaned periodically by an IBM tech.

He always soaked a rag with Isopropyl Alcohol and rubbed down all the keys of the typewriter and cleaned other areas in the machine. Isopropyl Alcohol doesn't corrode the blades of shears as some products do.

It has been my go to cleaner for blades on my Felco shears for over four decades. With razor sharp shears in hand, pruning rose branches is like a hot knife going through butter. In nearly 40 years of using razor sharp shears, I have never had one cane die back from a cut.

Floral Preservative

While there are tremendous products made by different companies, we have used Floralife Original Fresh Flower Food for decades with great success.

Without question, it extends the life of cut roses and allows blooms to grow and retain color. In some cases, the color intensifies in roses with this product.

It now is called Floralife Flower Food 300 which has all the great qualities of the original formulation.



Floralife Flower Food 300

It hydrates and nourishes roses while it has an acidifier to adjust the pH of water. It has sugar as an energy source and stem unpluggers to keep the vascular system of the rose flowing.

We typically purchase a 5-pound pail from Michael's Floral Supply (Sioux Falls, S.D.) which lasts several years. For more information, go on the internet to: www.michaelsfloralsupply.com

Refrigeration Vital

When Diane and I started growing roses over 38 years ago, we acquired a vintage 1958 refrigerator from her parents' home in Glendale, Ariz. We felt it would be great for extending the life of roses and also cool off canned drinks if we threw a party.

This refrigerator ultimately became an important tool for holding cut roses for rose shows as well. While it wasn't the best option for refrigerating roses, we were not about to spend several thousand dollars for a florist's refrigerator.

We kept it in our garage, and twice a year in April and November, it was fired up with a target temperature of 35. A temperature probe was placed in the refrigerator so we could monitor the temperature. The problem we had was that any time we opened the door, most of the cold air tumbled out while we put new, cut roses in. The temperature would shoot over 40 and gradually come back down.

Another problem we had was when night temperatures were under 50 degrees in the garage. The refrigerator tended to cool too much and would dip below 32 degrees on too many occasions which froze the Floralife liquid in the half gallon milk cartons the roses were in. Red blooms at times had a slight blue cast.

After this problem became worse and worse over the years, we decided a replacement was in order. But once again, we were not about to purchase a florist refrigerator because of the cost.

After researching what was available, we found a solution to our problem. Harold Baker, an avid exhibitor from Florida who also was an engineer, turned a chest freezer into a rose holding box. As an engineer, he tackled every situation in a meticulous approach.

He wrote out a list of what he wanted his ideal rose holding box to do, and it had to include cool air not coming out easily (like a typical refrigerator would when you open the door). He also wanted thick insulation and also wanted the refrigeration box to keep the temperature within 2 degrees. Cold air goes downward. When you open the top door of a chest freezer, the cold air doesn't move out of the unit for a period of time which is another benefit.



Chest Freezer

All of the things he put on his list pointed to a chest freezer. The only problem was that the temperature inside was typically well below freezing.

The next element was utilizing a digital thermostat that would solve the temperature situation. He found the perfect solution in a Ranco Single Stage Electronic Temperature Control which would keep the temperature differential within 1 degree and had a temperature range of -30 degrees to 220 degrees. It was utilized from beer making to snake handling.

The great thing about this digital temperature controller was that all you had to do was plug it into a wall outlet and then plug the freezer plug into this device. The temperature probe would be put in the freezer. Then you set the temperature you want inside the freezer (35 degrees), and you are set to go.

After talking at length with Harold Baker about his "coolest cooler," he mentioned that renowned national exhibitor Satish Prabhu from North Carolina also used this chest freezer with great success.

So I e-mailed Satish and learned that it was the best rose holding box he had ever had in his life. He purchased a 20 cubic foot chest freezer and a Ranco ETC 111000 Single Stage Electronic Temperature Control which allowed the temperature to stay at 35 degrees with precision.



Ranco Temperature Controller

With this great endorsement, I decided to take the plunge and purchase a 20 cubic foot chest freezer in 2011 and also purchase the Ranco ETC 111000 Single Stage Electronic Temperature Control which was \$50 from www.amazon.com Simple wiring directions can be found on www.youtube.com

For the next six months, I looked at ads in the Sunday *Arizona Daily Star* and any other ads that were sent to our mail box. I was told to wait for a price in the \$400 range before buying one by Satish. The lowest prices were consistently at Sears or Lowes. Ultimately, the price dipped to \$400 at Sears, and we purchased one.

Incredible Difference

After the 20 cubic foot freezer was delivered in the Fall of 2011, I hooked up my Ranco Temperature Control and set the controls at the proper parameters. It was obvious this was a game changer when it came to holding roses at a consistent temperature of 35 degrees.

When roses started blooming, we cut our roses with razor sharp shears, brought the blooms inside and then put them in Floralife Flower Food 300 inside half-filled half gallon milk containers. Then we put them in the chest freezer which was now a rose holding chest.

Since we had the Ranco Controller set for a 2 degree differential range, roses kept their form perfectly for 5-7 days without any problem at 35 degrees. White roses lasted up to 14 days. Over the past 10 years, I have been absolutely amazed at the quality of roses that have come out of this box even after a week.

While the chest freezer is nearly perfect, it has one nagging flaw. A safety feature with it allows a beeping sound to take place if the temperature is over 20 degrees as the compressor is running. While this is usually only a few minutes every few hours, it gets annoying. The reason it is there is to let someone know that the freezer is getting too warm, and everything in the box might start to melt.

It is a wonderful feature if you use the chest freezer the way it was supposed to. But in my case, it causes a headache. We called Sears and asked if you could unplug the device making the sound or even cut the wires on it. But a technician said it might cause a problem. So it would be wise to let it go.

We simply shut the door tight leading out of that room, and we can't hear the beeping which has solved the issue.

Final Thoughts

We have found the best times to cut roses from the garden are early in the morning and just before sunset to get roses to last longer. However, if a rose is at the ideal stage for picking at noon, by all means pick it then.

For the average person who is not showing roses, you can extend the life of roses considerably if you simply place a bouquet of roses in a vase in a refrigerator prior to going to bed. Then when you get up in the morning, take it out. Continue this process to extend the life of your cut roses.