

Bouquet Preservation Steps...How it Works

Goodhousekeeping Magazine rates the Heller & Reid preservation method, vacuum freeze-drying, as the best floral preservation method available today. To achieve these outstanding results is a labour intensive and time-consuming process. Each design is a custom work of art taking many hours to complete.

1. Bouquet is inventoried, photographed, taken apart and each flower re-hydrated (24 –36 hours). Ribbons, hankies, pins, beads etc. are removed, dried and stored for the bride to be attached later. Some ribbon is stained and every attempt is made to clean it so it can be re-used. A job folder is begun that will follow the brides flowers through every step of the process. The job order and photos are filed in the jackets.
2. Flowers are treated with different chemicals to open up cell structure and hold colour. The flower type and colour determines how it is treated and prepared for freezing. Flowers are loaded on trays and frozen from zero to –10 degrees. They remain frozen for three to four weeks.
3. Trays are loaded into the vacuum freeze dryer (preset at –20 degrees) in 15-minute segments. It takes a day to load the complete machine. The load will freeze down for at least 12 hours before the preservation process begins. A vacuum is formed on the chamber that contains the flowers the moisture (which is now a gas because of the cold) is forced out. This has to be done slowly or the moisture would burst out of the cells causing damage to the flowers. The flowers remain in the vacuum freeze dryer for 14 to 16 days. During this time the machine also warms to room temperature.
4. Flowers are removed from the equipment. They are somewhat brittle and will need to sit at room temperature for a few days to soften. Flowers are glued to wires. Color enhancement is applied as required. This allows them to be handled with out damaged and dipped or sprayed with a post-treat solution. This solution is like a thin layer of plastic that coats each flower protecting it from dust, moisture, and to some degree light. This takes process requires about two weeks for the full load.
5. Each customer's flowers are then stored in a special container to allow the flowers to "cure" before they are ready for the design phase. During this time the post-treat will completely dry and the flowers become less brittle and easier to handle. Depending on the flowers this may required 2-6 weeks.
6. Jobs are scheduled for final design work, clean up, and packaging. Every display is made to order and inspected. All design is check against the photography and approved. This process takes about two to four weeks depending on the workload at the time