



Using Cut Flowers and Potted Plants in Museums

Fact Sheet

By May Cassar

The use of plant and flower materials in museums is growing in popularity as they are increasingly opened for special events and entertaining. Museums are also using plants and flowers to decorate their own permanent displays.

This carries a heightened risk of damage to museum objects from pest infestation, pollen staining and from localised increase in humidity as well as scratches and chips when pots or containers are placed on museum objects, such as furniture. With careful planning and co-operation, this risk can be managed so that everyone can enjoy the beauty of flowers and plants within the museum environment.

1. Background

Approximately one-third of cut flowers and about half of the potted plants sold in the United Kingdom are locally grown. The rest are imported. Only spot checks of flowers imported from the EC are carried out; plants and flowers from the rest of the world must have a *phytosanitary* certificate stating that the plants or flowers are free from infectious diseases. This is issued in the country of origin after a visual check for pests.

While there are restrictions and prohibitions made by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the importation of some plant materials and soils from certain countries, by the time

the potted plants or cut flowers have reached the retailer, it is impossible for the customer to know from where the plants or flowers have originated and how they have been treated.

The Flowers & Plants Association advises that:

- Flowers should only be bought from a reputable outlet;
- Blooms should have firm petals;
- Flowers should be well wrapped for protection;
- Stems should be kept damp during transit;
- Cut flower food should be used to keep bacteria at bay;
- Lukewarm water should be used, except for spring bulb flowers;
- Leaves below the water line should be removed to avoid polluting the water;
- Flowers should be kept away from ripening fruit;
- Faded flowers should be removed;
- Thoroughly clean vases should be used to avoid bacteria which kills flowers and makes them prone to pest infestation.

When choosing potted plants, select plants which prefer growing conditions similar to the environmental conditions in the museum. If the museum is dry and hot, try desert plants like agaves, aloes, yuccas and cacti, although they may suffer if light levels are low. Tropical plants are not advisable because they prefer humid

conditions, even if they are tolerant of low light levels. Choose plants which the retailer can confirm are grown in sterilised soil (See Appendix 1).

2. Managing use of plant and flower materials

List individually all areas in the museum where plants are allowed, including mezzanines, balconies, lobbies, exhibition spaces, public areas and private offices such as the Director's Office. Unlisted areas, for example museum stores or the conservation workshop, must be barred to plants at all times.

Any changes in location or addition of plant and flower materials must be approved formally by representatives of conservation, events and building maintenance, whose views must be communicated to senior management.

3. Procedures for office use of plants

It may not be immediately obvious why there should be concern over the use of plants and flowers in parts of the museum such as offices where there are no museum objects. However, careless introduction, maintenance and disposal can increase the risk of pest infestation from diseased or dead plants and flowers, spreading into the rest of the museum.

- Choose low light tolerant, pest resistant plants (See Appendix 1).
- Individual staff members must be responsible for watering and feeding.
- Diseased or pest-infested plants must be bagged in plastic rubbish bags and closed tightly before disposal outside the building.

- Areas around plants must be routinely monitored and cleaned.

4. Guidelines for use of plants and flowers by museum staff to complement museum exhibitions

Plants and flowers give a welcoming air to historic house displays, and can complement the mood of exhibition design in museums. In the Anglo-Dutch Garden exhibition at Christie's London in 1989, they were an integral part of the exhibition, with floral displays replicating still life paintings on display, used with great effect.

Plants associated with permanent displays

- Keep potted plants and floral displays in proportion to the scale of the objects on exhibition.
- Potted plants must be free of disease and pests and must be in sterilised soil.
- Maintenance of museum plants must be the responsibility of a nominated individual.
- No plants may be placed temporarily in between existing displays of flowers or plants.
- Plants brought in for replacement, special events or openings must be inspected by an appropriate member of staff, either the curator in charge of the event or a maintenance representative.
- Seasonal flowering plants must be kept in pots with saucers. Stamen which produce floral pollen must be removed from flowers.
- Do not use wood or bamboo-type containers as they may be a vehicle for pests. Use terracotta, stone, metal or plastic containers.

Plants for use during special events

- Plants and flowers for catered events must be inspected by a museum representative in charge of the event.
- Doubts over the suitability of any plant and flower materials must be referred to a conservator.
- Plants and flowers brought in for special events must be issued with a pass after inspection.
- Plants and flowers brought in for special events must be removed from the building in their entirety within 24 hours of the end of the event.
- Museum staff responsible for the event must issue the work order to remove plants and flowers.
- All diseased and pest-infested plants and flowers wherever they are located, must be bagged and tied in plastic rubbish bags before being moved through the building. They must be disposed of in a rubbish container outside the building.

5. Guidelines for museums used as venues for plant or floral displays

Plant and flower exhibitions and competitions in museums are common events in the United States. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has a floral designer as a permanent member of staff based in its special events office. The guidelines below indicate the level of management needed for such activities should museums decide to become involved with these types of events.

- Identify specific tables, stands or areas of floor where plants may be placed. After their position has been checked and approved by an appropriate member of the museum staff, they must not be moved. Labels must be provided by the museum and no other signage allowed.
- Containers must be stable on their base. Displays must not be top heavy, so counter weights must be provided within the base. Shallow bowls of water cannot be used.
- Only live or fresh-cut long-lasting plant material may be used. No fresh fruit or vegetables, and no protected plant or flower species or artificial materials may be used.
- Accessories such as textiles, bamboo, wood chips, cocoa shells, stones, or pebbles are not permitted.
- Floral designers may not use soil in cut flower displays. Any soil used for potted plants must be sterilised.
- A plant/flower data sheet must be completed and handed to the museum staff member responsible for the event.
- Plant and flower materials must not touch gallery walls or any museum objects on display.
- Plant and flower designers are encouraged to visit the museum to see and measure the display area in advance, by prior appointment with the museum staff member responsible for the event.
- As much preparation as possible must be done in advance. No cutting or potting up may take place in the galleries.
- No museum object on open display including furniture may be touched, or have anything draped or attached to it, or its stand or display case.
- Plants and flowers must not cover any museum object label. Visitors must not have to walk around a plant or floral display to read a label.

- Careful conditioning of plants and flowers is important. Improperly conditioned, they may not last in a museum which experiences low humidity.
- Plants must be free of disease and pests.
- Faded blooms must be removed daily and the area left free of debris.
- Arrangements for care and watering must be approved by a conservator.
- Watering must be done carefully. Accidental drips must be wiped immediately. The area must be kept clean and dry at all times.
- Misting or spraying is not permitted in galleries or public areas.
- Any photography or filming must be carried out according to established museum protocol.

6. Guidelines for plant and flower delivery

Planning the delivery and removal of plants and flowers reduces the risk of pest infestation.

- A designated museum entrance must be selected to which all delivery personnel must report.
- A map of the location of the entrance must be provided.
- A date and time for deliveries must be specified.
- An escort to the location of the event for delivery personnel must be provided.
- No floral preparations may be carried out anywhere in the museum.
- No candles may be used as part of an arrangement.
- Plants, flowers and accessories must be removed from the building within 24 hours of the end of the event.

- Temporary storage of containers marked with the owner's name and address may be arranged in advance with the museum.
- The museum will not be held responsible for any items left after an event and will dispose of them.

References

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), The Plant Health Guide for Importers

Sources of information

For information on how the flower industry operates, top ten cut flowers and top ten houseplants (by sales value), care and conditioning tips for cut flowers:

Flowers & Plants Association (FPA)
Covent House
New Covent Garden Market
London SW8 5NX

Tel: 0207 738 8044 Fax: 0207 622 5307
E-mail: press-office@flowers.org.uk
Web site: www.flowers.org.uk

For information on horticultural services in the United Kingdom:

The Horticultural Trades Association
Horticulture House
19 High Street
Theale
Reading Berkshire
RG7 5AH
Tel: 0118 930 3132
Fax: 0118 932 3453
E-mail: infor@the-hta.org.uk
Web site: www.the-hta.org.uk

For horticultural advice (membership required):

The Royal Horticultural Society
80 Vincent Square
London SW1P 2PE
Tel: 0207 834 4333 (general enquiries)
Tel: 01483 224234 (advice)
Fax: 01483 211750 (advice)
E-mail: webmaster@rhs.org.uk
Web site: www.rhs.org.uk

**Copies of this fact sheet can be
provided in alternative formats.
Please contact MGC
Publications for further
information.**

Museums & Galleries Commission
16 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AA
Telephone 0171 233 4200
Facsimile 0171 233 3686

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APPENDIX 1

Selected checklist of suitable plants

Low light tolerance:

Low light means less than 4000lux, which is far higher than is acceptable in the museum environment. Some plants could live for several months at a lower than acceptable light level. This will vary from plant to plant.

Cast iron:

These plants will tolerate some neglect.

LATIN BOTANICAL PLANT NAMES	LOW LIGHT TOLERANCE	PEST RESISTANCE
Abromeitiella	-	YES
Adenia	-	YES
Aeschynanthus	YES	-
Agave	-	YES
Aglaonema (cast iron)	YES	YES
Aloe (cast iron)	-	YES
Amorphophallus	YES	-
Anthurium	YES	-
Aspidistra (cast iron)	YES	-
Beaucarnea (cast iron)	YES	YES
Begonia (cast iron)	YES	YES
Brassaia (cast iron)	-	YES
Calathea	YES	-
Calibanus	-	YES
Chlorophytum	YES	-
Cordyline (cast iron)	-	YES
Cryptanthus	-	YES
Cyanastrum	YES	-
Cyanotis	-	YES
Dianella	-	YES
Dieffenbachia	YES	-
Dracaena (cast iron)	YES	-
Ehretia (cast iron)	YES	-
Elaeagnus	-	YES
Equisetum	YES	-
Excocharia	-	YES
Fatshedera	YES	-
Ficus (cast iron)	YES	-
Fittonia	YES	-
Graptophyllum	-	YES
Guaiacum	-	YES
Guzmania	-	YES
Haemaria	YES	-
Hechtia	-	YES

Homalocladium (cast iron)	YES	YES
Kaempferia	YES	-
Leea	YES	YES
Macodes	YES	-
Maranta	YES	-
Mangifera	-	YES
Monstera	YES	-
Myrtus	YES	-
Myrsine	-	YES
Pelargonium	-	YES
Pelliania	YES	-
Peperomia	-	YES
Peresteia	-	YES
Philodendron	YES	-
Pilea	YES	YES
Pittosporum	-	YES
Plectranthus	YES	-
Podocarpus	-	YES
Polyscias (cast iron)	YES	-
Pseuderanthemum	-	YES
Rhoicissus	YES	-
Sageretia	-	YES
Sansevieria (cast iron)	-	YES
Schismatoglottis	YES	-
Scindapsus	YES	YES
Setcreasia	-	YES
Siderasis	YES	-
Spathiphyllum (cast iron)	YES	-
Yucca	-	YES
Zamioculcas (cast iron)	-	YES