



NATHAN DENETTE / NATIONAL POST

Karina Lemke is a strong woman. She has to be, when dealing with both the flower mafia and bridezillas.

GIN AND TULIPS

Equally renowned for creating brilliant bouquets for budget-busting bridezillas on Slice Network's *Rich Bride, Poor Bride* as she is for designing floral couture for visiting celebs (Justin Timberlake, Mariah Carey, Cher, Elton John), Karina Lemke, owner of Posies Flowers, gives Zenya Sirant the dirt on making it in the bloom biz.

Q *What prompted you to become a florist?*

A I've always had a love of flowers; at the age of eight, instead of buying chips and chocolate with my spending money every week, I would go to our neighbourhood flower shop, hand over my \$2 and buy three bachelor's buttons, or whatever happened to be in season. But I never thought I'd get into the business. After I graduated from U of T and didn't want to go to law school, I scanned the business-for-sale section in the classifieds, circled "downtown flower shop," went to look at it and bought it. That was about 12 years ago.

Q *How long should a bouquet last?*

A In the summertime, four or five days. If the room is cool and you change the water frequently and you get lucky, bouquets can last more than 10 days. Although the

10-day bouquets from some grocery chains are a joke. Who'd want 10 days of ugly? I'd rather have four days of beautiful.

Q *Where do your flowers come from?*

A The better product is coming through Holland — it's basically like the floral mafia — there's a big auction that sells to just about everywhere in the world. In Toronto, we also have an auction that happens every day; it starts at about 4 a.m. and goes until about 9 a.m. As opposed to a regular auction where the prices get higher as time goes on, here the prices get lower. So if you are looking for something specific, say you have a wedding coming up and you need 5,000 white roses, the roses come around on this big rack and, because you need them, you bid first and pay top dollar.

Q *Any tips on extending the life of your cut stems?*

A Apparently a little bit of vodka or gin in tulips make them last a little bit longer. Another trick is putting a drop of bleach in the water. Fresh flower food — you know those little packages? — basically contains a powdered version of bleach and sugar. Sugar makes the flowers grow and bleach kills the bacteria.

Q *What kind of flowers do you give to someone who has allergies?*

A Always speak to your florist first. If people have allergies, you want to stay away from very fragrant things, like lilies. Gerbera daisies and orchids are usually safe. They have a scent, but most people are not allergic to them, as they're not pollen-based. Also, if you're sending flowers to someone going through chemotherapy, anything scented is going to make them nauseous very quickly.

Q *Do you have any tips for brides?*

A When in doubt, always go with whites or ivories, or soft bridal shades — blush, sherbet. They are classic, timeless and elegant. You don't want to look back on it, in five, 10 or 20 years, and think you made a hideous mistake, so go conservative.

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