

## **Are Cut Flowers Bad for the Environment?**

Many people like to celebrate major holidays with lavish bouquets of cut flowers. As a result, the flower industry is booming, shipping hundreds of tons of cut flowers all over the world for sale in supermarkets and at florists. Consumers spend millions every year purchasing cut flowers and bringing them into their homes: and most consumers do not think about the environmental and social aspects of the cut flower industry. Several studies conducted in the late 1990s suggested that cut flowers had a serious environmental impact, and some advocacy organizations have attempted to raise consumer awareness about the hidden costs of cut flowers.

Most cut flowers are grown in South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia in large greenhouse environments staffed by underpaid, non-unionized workers. The greenhouses are carefully climate controlled to yield the best cut flowers, and they are also heavily sprayed with pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides. Because cut flowers are grown in nations with more lax environmental laws, many banned substances including DDT and methyl-bromide are used in flower production. These substances have a profound impact on the health of the workers: many suffer from health problems such as skin conditions, respiratory problems, impaired vision, and birth defects thanks to their exposure to these chemicals.

In addition to hurting the workers, these chemicals are also extremely harmful for the environment. Methyl-bromide has been linked with destruction of the ozone layer, for example, while DDT usage worldwide led to serious problems for many animal and bird populations. Most greenhouses which produce cut flowers dump chemicals on their crops in large amounts. These chemicals later enter the bodies of workers, the flowers, and the ground water. Water pollution around commercial greenhouses hurts animal and fish populations and also has an impact on human life as well, by reducing the amount of drinkable water.

Once the flowers are grown, they still must be shipped to a final destination, greatly contributing to global pollution. Some cut flowers may be shipped thousands of miles, adding carbon dioxide to the atmosphere at every step of the way. At the florist, the flowers are arranged and prepared for sale, and some florists have complained of skin and other health problems as a result of prolonged contact with cut flowers. Finally, the consumer brings the flowers home, perhaps tossing them carelessly into a shopping cart laden with organic, fair trade produce and other food stuffs.

The serious environmental impact caused by the cut flower industry began to raise eyebrows in the early twenty first century, when consumer advocacy organizations began to educate people about the problems with cut flowers. Usually, stories about cut flowers peak around Valentine's Day, in an attempt to convince consumers to buy organic, locally raised flowers which do not carry heavy environmental impacts with them. Local seasonal flowers can be just as handsome, and even more unusual, especially when combined with other thoughtful gifts.

### **Source:**

<http://www.wisegeek.com/are-cut-flowers-bad-for-the-environment.htm>