

## HEAD TURNERS

> Assigned a centerpiece for the grand opening of a doctor's office earlier this summer, Letecia Burkett, AIFD, designed a country look of sunflowers and 'Kermit' chrysanthemums — with a twist. For visual interest, the owner of Anytime Flowers in Blackwell, Oklahoma, inserted a few 'Brenda' proteas. "This is a rural town, where people rarely see exotic flowers, so I like to use them as conversation starters." When she dropped off the arrangement, she watched with joy as nurses and patients "oohed and ahed" and stroked the proteas, before engaging the admirers with a little background on the flowers' origins.

Across the country, designers report a similar reaction whenever they use proteas.

"We use them by the hundreds every week," said BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, owner of Bouquets in Denver, Colorado. Proteas' arresting shapes and textures fit his shop's signature style (clean, contemporary and architectural) while their uncommonness fascinates customers and pumps up designs' perceived value.

Gary Wells, AIFD, owner of Premiere Designs in Grand Rapids, Michigan, likes to use the petals of 'Pink Mink' proteas for corsage work. "It's a great accent, particularly against a black dress," he said.

Whenever a customer in El Paso, Texas requests something "unusual," "unexpected" or "striking," Dov E. Kupfer, AIFD, reaches for proteas. "I love introducing consumers to them," said the owner of Designs by Dov E.

"They've been my favorite flowers for years," said Elizabeth Borchers, floral manager for The Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina. "Though they're native to Africa, proteas look beautiful in modern tropical designs, as well as rustic bouquets. I tell brides they are so worth the money!"

Here are but a few of the many magnificent members of the Proteaceae family (get care tips on p. 48). 🌿

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'COCCINEA' BANKSIA  
Resendiz Brothers



'HONEY BARBARA' GREVILLEA  
Resendiz Brothers



'CHICAGO' LEUCOSPERMUM  
Resendiz Brothers



'ALI' LEUCOSPERMUM  
Resendiz Brothers



'PHIL PARVIN' LEUCOSPERMUM  
Resendiz Brothers



**'ARISTATA' PROTEA**  
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**'GRANDICOLOR' PROTEA**  
Resendiz Brothers



**'IVY' PROTEA**  
Resendiz Brothers



**'PINK PASSION' KING PROTEA**  
Resendiz Brothers



**'NITIDA' PROTEA**  
Resendiz Brothers



**'PINITA' PROTEA**  
Resendiz Brothers



**ORANGE LEUCOSPERMUM**  
Jet Fresh Floral Distributors



**RED LEUCOSPERMUM**  
Jet Fresh Floral Distributors



**'ROBYN' PROTEA**  
Cape Floral



**'VENUS' PROTEA**  
Cape Floral



**WHITE REPENS PROTEA**  
Cape Floral



**WHITE KING PROTEA**  
NZ Bloom

## POWER UP YOUR PROTEA

> Proteas, among nature's most spectacular flowers, make a statement in any arrangement or bouquet. The large flowers are available in a wide range of colors and exotic shapes and are made up of hundreds of individual flowers.

They're also plentiful: Proteas are native to temperate regions of South Africa, but are grown in many countries, making them easier to source. Florists can buy proteas of some type any time of the year, but certain varieties have specific seasons.

### Start Strong

As with any flower, to get the best value, start with excellent flowers. Choose King protea flowers with four to five bracts still folded over the center — that will indicate fresh flowers and strong care and handling along the supply chain. With other proteas, look for a center that's open and visible through the bracts. Foliage should be fresh and bright green.

The woody stems and leathery leaves rarely show mechanical damage and withstand handling and shipping very well. When cutting the woody stem, use sharp shears. Ignore misguided advice to mash the ends of woody cuts; crushing stems reduces water uptake instead of increasing it.

Proteas are not tropical flowers, as they may appear, and do well with cold shipping (usually in the 35 F to 42 F range) and storage temperatures (more on that in a moment).

Proteas are, however, sensitive to drying out and depletion of sugars following harvest, during shipping and retail storage and display. Growers must process and store flowers quickly after harvest to avoid having them dry out. Avoid paper and cardboard packing materials, which may absorb water from the leaves and flowers. Use of an anti-transparent spray may be beneficial.

### Handle with Care

Upon arrival in your store, proteas should not be stored dry but instead should be removed from their boxes and processed promptly. Remove leaves that will fall below the water line, and leave all other leaves on the stems. Take care not to damage leaves during pro-



cessing, because proteas depend on the movement of sugars from the leaves to the flowers.

Proteas absorb large amounts of water and a good supply of sugar. For the best water absorption, cut about 1.5 inches from the stems with a clean, sharp knife and place the flowers in clean buckets with full-strength flower food. Properly mixed flower food will accelerate and maintain water absorption and provide additional sugar that may not be available from leaves.

Ideal storage conditions include humidity levels of 75 percent to 85 percent and temperatures of 35 F to 42 F. Research also shows that good lighting during storage of proteas promotes water absorption. We recommend 100 to 200 footcandles (1,076 to 2,152 lux). As with most cut flowers, proteas can be stored for a few days, but no longer than three days, or they won't hold up for your customers.

### Battle Blackening

The biggest post-harvest challenge for proteas is leaf blackening, the darkening of the leaf margins or leaf edges or localized dark spots on any portion of the leaf. Generally, leaf blackening is associated with dehydration, lack of sugars during post-harvest and lack of lighting during storage. Blackening is reduced or eliminated when growers, wholesalers and retailers use flower food solutions. 🌱

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