

THREE WAYS TO SOURCE HOUSEPLANTS

> Many florists want to cash in on the houseplant trend, and for good reason; having a popular product in the store for grab-and-go gifts generates extra revenue. One of the largest hurdles to getting into houseplant sales is finding an affordable method to ship the plants from Florida, where the bulk of houseplants are grown and many freight carriers operate. There are several ways to approach sourcing depending on the volume of a florist's order.

Less Than Truckload Freight

A florist who sells a lot of plants quickly and places high-volume orders should use less than truckload (LTL) carriers. These are trucks that provide weekly service delivering direct to florists. LTLs pick up from multiple Florida nurseries and consolidate the plants for single-stop deliveries. The downside of using these

trucking companies is that they have higher minimums and limited service in the spring, when they are delivering to garden centers. New customers can get shipping services mid-June through March. April and May are off limits unless you are already an established year-round customer.

FedEx Freight Box

A florist who wants to order less than an LTL minimum can ask nurseries about the FedEx freight box system. This system allows a single pallet of material to be shipped directly to the florist for a flat rate per pallet. (Even though the rates are flat, there is also a variable fuel surcharge assessed weekly by FedEx.) The minimum for the freight box system is about a third of the volume required by LTL carriers, but it is more expensive than LTL carriers.

Priority service reaches the majority of the Midwest with two- to three-day shipping and the far north and western states with four- to five-day shipping. Cold

weather can be restrictive on which weeks nurseries can ship. However, nurseries have had plenty of reliable success shipping with this method.

Another benefit of the freight box system is that different pot sizes can be configured on the pallet in several ways, offering the florist more variety in sizing. It can be a challenge at first to understand what fits on a pallet. The most popular configurations among florists ordering a wide variety of plant sizes are 90 four-inch pots; 36 six-inch pots; and 25 eight-inch pots. That adds up to a full pallet. A florist can order less than a full pallet, but remember, the shipping rate is flat so it's most cost efficient to fill it up.

Wholesalers

A florist who doesn't carry a large inventory of plants might consider a plant wholesaler. These are companies that pick up mass volumes of plants weekly and run routes for delivery to florists, who can choose what they want off the truck. The price of plants sourced this way may at first seem high; however, there is more cost — and risk — involved for the wholesaler. Their prices include sourcing, freight and re-handling, and account for the risk they take for making speculative sales.

Determining the best way to ship plants is never easy, but having plants in the shop as another revenue-generating product is just smart business. The bigger variety of plants a florist can offer to walk-in customers, the greater the chances of turning a browser into a buyer — and perhaps a buyer of several varieties of plants. Don't let the walk-in customer walk out empty handed. 🌿

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