Center for Earth Leadership

eco tips

Fresh Cut Flowers

Why we care

We use fresh cut flowers to celebrate an occasion, brighten up our homes and give as gifts. But where do the flowers come from? Most cut flowers we buy (78%) are grown in countries like Colombia, Ecuador, and Costa Rica where weak environmental and worker safety laws allow the use of chemicals that would not be allowed in the U.S. Exposure to these chemicals is particularly dangerous for workers in greenhouses where up to 127 different chemicals are used in enclosed spaces. The U.S. Custom's zero-pest policy creates a powerful incentive to overuse pesticides, and there are no limits on the amount of reside on imported flowers. But the problem isn't just confined to imports. Non-organic flowers grown in the U.S. often use chemicals that are harmful to people and fish.

Simple, positive steps

- Ask for the *VeriFlora* label, which establishes sustainable agriculture and labor standards for flowers grown anywhere in the world for sale in the U.S. Other certifications to look for are *Rain Forest Alliance*, which has standards to protect the environment and workers, and *Fair Trade*, which assures that workers have a way to improve their wages and working conditions.
- Purchase sustainably grown flowers locally from retailers such as Botanica Floral Design, Petal Passion, and Whole Foods.
- Look for flowers at farmer's markets during the growing season (May – October).
- Grow your own. Roses, tulips, gladiolas, lilies and zinnias make great cut flowers.
- Purchase potted plants instead of cut flowers.

Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at jeanne@earthleaders.org.