

Ask European flower growers which pesticides they use, how often they apply them, and what they do to prevent pests before spraying. Also ask what records or independent checks support their answers, especially if low pesticide use matters to your purchase.

Start with the growing routine

A bunch of stems on a kitchen table tells you little about how the flowers were grown. A useful conversation starts earlier, in the greenhouse or field, with the pests the grower sees and the choices made to manage them.

Ask which crops receive pesticide treatments and why. A grower may have different practices for roses, tulips and other flowers, or for plants grown indoors and outdoors. Ask about the whole growing period, not just the days before harvest.

It helps to be specific. You could ask for the following information:

- The names of products used on the flowers you want to buy and the pests they target.
- How often treatments are applied and when the most recent application took place.
- Which nonchemical methods are used, such as monitoring pests, removing affected plants or introducing beneficial insects.
- How the grower decides that a treatment is necessary.
- Whether application records or a recent audit can be shared.

Some growers may not provide every commercial detail. Even so, they should be able to explain their general approach and tell you which flowers their answer covers.

Ask what claims actually mean

Words such as natural, sustainable and low spray can sound reassuring on a market sign, but they do not explain a treatment schedule. Ask the grower to define the claim and describe how it is checked. If a flower is described as organic, ask which certification applies and whether the particular crop is included.

Ask about treatments made after harvest, too. Flowers can pass through several hands before they reach a vase, so the grower may not know everything done later. If that is the case, ask the seller who can provide that information.

European rules require professional pesticide users to follow principles of integrated pest management. These include considering preventive measures and monitoring pests. The details of implementation and oversight can vary by country, so a reference to European rules alone is not a complete account of a farm's practices.

Check evidence and use the answer

Records can show what was applied and when. A certification or audit may provide another source of evidence, but its value depends on what its standards cover. Ask to see the relevant certificate or a summary of the audit, and check that it is current and applies to the flowers you are buying.

If residue is your concern, ask whether the flowers have been tested, which substances the test covered and when the sample was taken. A record of applications is not the same as a residue test, and a test for selected substances cannot establish that no other residue is present.

Keep the conversation practical. A grower who can explain decisions clearly and distinguish known facts from missing information gives you more to work with than a simple promise of clean flowers.

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