

Mother's Day flowers

Whether for Mother's Day, birthdays, or 'just because' – make sure you send flowers with the 'wow' factor

Mother's Day is second only to birthdays when it comes to sending flowers. But how can you be sure that the flowers you choose will be perfect? To answer this question, we ordered flowers from 15 delivery services – and found big differences in quality and value for money.

Our bouquets came from eight high-street retailers or supermarkets, three independent florists with a website, and four relay services (such as Interflora). Relay services are part of a network of florists across the UK; you place your order direct with the service or at your local florist, and delivery is carried out by the member florist closest to your delivery address.

HOW AND WHEN TO ORDER

With some companies you can order flowers in store, but most take orders by phone or online. We found pros and cons to the last two methods (see below). However you order, make sure you do so in plenty of time for a big occasion like Mother's Day (Sunday 26 March this year). Though some suppliers gave their last order date as a day or two beforehand, many said they run out of flowers or delivery slots very quickly and it's best to order a week or two in advance. Some also charge a fee for delivery on a Sunday.

Ordering by phone – pros and cons

- You're sometimes kept on hold, but it can be quicker and easier than filling in online forms.
- You can ask extra questions if you want to.
- It's easier to opt out of marketing material (rather than having to tick a well-hidden box).

Ordering online – pros and cons

- Some suppliers offer online discounts. They don't always make this clear on their websites, so check the price if you'd rather order by phone.
- You should receive a confirmation email, so you know everything's OK – if you order by phone, get a reference number just in case.

Delivery

Of 30 bouquets sent to us or our mums' panel, three didn't arrive on the day they were due (one bouquet from M&S,

PICK OF THE BUNCH

10/10

**FLOWERS DIRECT
'CITRUS COMBI'**

Mother's Day delivery ✓
Expert opinion Dynamic, imaginative, striking, out of the ordinary. Well arranged and prepared. Flowers well matched, packaging attractive. A good armful of quality flowers.
One week later All but the gerberas lasted well.
Mum's verdict 'A stunning bunch with the "wow" factor!'

FRESHEST FLOWERS

9/10

**CLINTON CARDS
'LILY AND ROSE'**

Mother's Day delivery X
Expert opinion Simple, classy, unadorned luxury. No foliage – might benefit from more texture. Good colour combination and flower quality make it stand out – roses and lilies superbly fresh.
One week later Still in beautiful condition.
Mum's verdict 'All flowers and nothing but flowers – amazing impact.'

9/10

**NETFLORA
'SCENTED DELIGHT'**

Mother's Day delivery ✓
Expert opinion Pretty, safe, traditional bouquet. Good quality and very fresh. Missing a couple of flowers pictured online, but same overall effect, and freesias made it smell sweet.
One week later Flowers still very fresh. Score brought up to reflect this.
Mum's verdict 'Really nice, although not that striking.'

8/10

**SERENATA FLOWERS
'PUMPKIN PIE'**

Mother's Day delivery ✓
Expert opinion Strong, funky, vibrant and eye-catching. Only three flower types but work well together with foliage. Nice wrapping, expensive flowers, very slight bruising on gerbera.
One week later Gerbera lasted well but roses wilted.
Mum's verdict 'Delighted to receive it. Still looked fantastic after a week.'

8/10

**JOHN LEWIS
'ANASTASIA'**

Mother's Day delivery X
Expert opinion Tasteful and sophisticated large blooms give a bold, dramatic effect. A few crushed petals, but colour tones of flowers and packaging subtle and attractive.
One week later About 50 per cent of bouquet had to be thrown away.
Mum's verdict 'Impressive and attractive.'

Serenata Flowers and Netflora). When we found out that Netflora's bouquet hadn't reached the mum it was meant for, we called Netflora a couple of days later at around 10.30am. It offered to deliver the flowers the same day, even throwing in chocolates to apologise.

We called both Serenata and M&S after 5pm on the day the flowers were due. Serenata organised delivery before 10.30am the following day.

But M&S said we'd called too late for next-day delivery, so the flowers ended up being two days late. M&S told us: 'This is not an acceptable level of service and we are looking into it as a matter of urgency.' A few days later we received a letter of apology, a refund and a £10 voucher; M&S says this is standard practice when it receives a complaint about its flower service.

Many suppliers don't allow you to specify morning or afternoon delivery, and those that do usually charge extra. If your recipient might be out, most suppliers let you request alternative arrangements. Finally, if the address is tricky to find or doesn't come up on postcode finders, give the supplier as many extra details as possible.

If you have any problems with your flowers, try calling the florist which delivered them or the supplier you bought them from. If that fails, contact the British Florist Association (0870 240 3208), which will do its best to help and is currently working on an official code of practice.

If the flowers are damaged or of poor quality, take a photo. Many suppliers reserve the right to change the content without notice but it should always be of equal value and, where possible, in the same colour choice.



Caring for your flowers

DO

✓ Cut about an inch diagonally off the end of stems to aid water absorption. Make sure your knife or scissors are sharp to avoid crushing. If the flowers start to wilt, cutting off a bit more stem may help.
✓ Add cut-flower food to the water. Ideally use the quantities shown on the packet, but if this would make the water in the vase very shallow, it's better to add more water.

✓ Strip off all leaves below the water line in the vase.
✓ Put the flowers in a cool place, out of direct sun and draughts, and not above a radiator.
✓ Top up vase water regularly, adding more food if possible.
✓ Remove dead blooms, and keep flowers away from fruit. Dead blooms and fruit emit gases that cause other flowers to die sooner.



✓ Use sticky tape to remove spilled lily pollen – water will make the stain worse.
✓ If roses start to droop, recut, wrap them up tightly in damp newspaper past the head height and plunge them into very hot water. Leave for several hours or all night and the heads should straighten up.

DON'T

✗ Bash the stems – this will hinder the stems' water absorption.

✗ Add bleach, aspirin or coins to the water – at best they'll do nothing, and at worst they might harm your flowers. Your best bet is clean water and flower food.
✗ Put daffodils or tulips in the same vase as non-bulbous flowers. They give off a slime that can affect other flowers.
✗ Leave lilies in reach of cats. The flowers and pollen are highly poisonous to them.



7/10**TELEFLORIST
'PEACHES & CREAM'**

Mother's Day delivery ✓
Expert opinion Eyecatching, with unusual and cleverly chosen flowers and berries; foliage a little heavy. Lilies very good, but roses and anemones slightly over-mature. Poor resemblance to what was ordered.
One week later Roses dead, but berries and lilies good.
Mum's verdict 'Impressive, simple, classic and calming.'

7/10**TESCO
'PISTACHIO'**

Mother's Day delivery ✓
Expert opinion Stylish, imaginative and textured. Pleasing colours and a fresh look but wrapping looks cheap. Let down by quantity – flower count is sparse.
One week later Roses all dead, foliage wilted – remainder still looking good.
Mum's verdict 'Fresh looking and interesting – I was thrilled to receive it.'

7/10**MARKS AND SPENCER
'SPRING SUNSHINE BOUQUET'**

Mother's Day delivery ✓
Expert opinion Good colour choice with tasteful and bold packaging, but careless arrangement. Mainly cheaper flowers, some severely damaged. Poor value.
One week later Lilies opened nicely, but gerberas floppy and chrysanthemums tired.
Mum's verdict 'Not that impressive. A big let down.'

7/10**FLYING FLOWERS
'CASSIS BOUQUET'**

Mother's Day delivery X
Expert opinion No attempt at arrangement – flowers just shoved together. Online photo much more impressive. Poor value, cheap, low-quality flowers – several florets broken off and some flowers bruised.
One week later Lasted very well, bringing score up.
Mum's verdict 'Looked cheap and common.'

6/10**CLARE FLORIST
'MANDARIN BLUES'**

Mother's Day delivery X
Expert opinion Dramatic colour combination, but doesn't hang together as a bouquet. Irises a main feature in the online picture, but blue hyacinths given instead. Tulips overmature. Poor value for money.
One week later Petals fell off tulips, hyacinths faded.
Mum's verdict 'A colourful and striking mix.'

6/10**SAINSBURY'S 'SPRING ROSE AND LILY'**

Mother's Day delivery X
Expert opinion Good selection of foliage, with birch twigs adding a nice touch. Feminine and pretty without being twee. Minor bruising on some outer petals which can be pulled off.
One week later Roses unopened, lilies distorted, and foliage yellowing.
Mum's verdict 'Pleasing rather than impressive.'

5/10**POST OFFICE 'SIMPLY SAPPHIRE'**

Mother's Day delivery X
Expert opinion Pretty, subtle colour combination, but disappointing overall. Cheap, small flowers, with some petal loss. Online picture shows a full bouquet with large, better quality blooms.
One week later Not bad. Lily leaves yellowing and other flowers a little tired.
Mum's verdict 'OK, but nothing special.'

4/10**ASDA 'CITRUS SPLENDOUR'**

Mother's Day delivery X
Expert opinion Trying to be trendy but failing. Good value in terms of volume but mismatching colours and poor quality – flowers bruised and packaging damaged.
One week later Nearly everything dead.
Mum's verdict 'Bouquet looked lopsided and past its best. I'd be disappointed to receive it as a gift.'

OUR RESEARCH

We ordered, anonymously, a spring bouquet costing from £30 to £35, including delivery charges where applicable, from 15 national suppliers. Two experts from our sister publication, *Gardening Which?*, one of whom is a trained florist, assessed bouquets for flower quality, selection, value for money, aesthetics, packaging, similarity to the online picture and longevity. We've ranked the flowers from best to worst by overall score. We also sent bouquets to a panel of five mums to get their views. Where possible, we ordered bouquets for the mums' panel online, and those for our experts over the phone.