

**SPECIFICATIONS
CUT FLOWERS
GENERAL**

February 2012

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The General Specifications for Cut Flowers apply to all auctions affiliated with the Association of Dutch Flower Auctions (VBN) as of February 1, 2012.

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Introduction

The General Specifications for Cut Flowers apply to all types, varieties and cultivars that are traded as cut flowers via auctions affiliated with the Association of Dutch Flower Auctions (VBN).

All products sold via the auctions are exclusively intended for decorative purposes and are not intended for internal use unless specifically otherwise indicated on the product. In the case of incorrect use, consumption, contact and/or allergy the products may have harmful consequences for humans and/or animals.

The general specifications consist of requirements for quality, grading, packing and identification. The general specifications consist of requirements concerning quality, grading, packing and identification. Deviation of these requirements is only possible by explicit agreement between supplier and buyer, established beforehand via a intermediary office of a VBN auction.

Please refer to the product specifications for additional requirements per product. These are appendices to the general specifications which are issued per product. The requirements set forth in the General Specifications apply to all cut flowers unless otherwise stated in the product specifications.

Definition of Terms

ABNORMAL GROWTH

Imperfections in the flower, leaf and/or stem parts resulting from disorders during growth/culture.

ACTIVE INGREDIENT CODE

For the sake of clarity, pre-treatment agents are coded according to their active ingredients. The code is printed on the label.

BENT NECKS

The uppermost part of the stem under the flower, drooping downward.

CLUSTER WIDTH

The size of the inflorescence of *Celosia argentea Cristata Grp* (the cristate cluster), measured across the greatest width, expressed in cm. The cluster width can be indicated in the assortment code by means of characteristics code S23 for minimum flower diameter.

COLOUR UNIFORMITY

The batch must be composed in such a way that the selling units are uniform in terms of colour composition.

CUT FLOWERS

The term "cut flowers" also includes ornamental green twigs and cut shrubs.

DAMAGE

Damaged leaf- or flower parts resulting from jolting, bruising, pinching, cutting, etc.

DEFICIENCIES

A shortage of nutrients leads to aberrant colouring in flower and/or leaf.

DO NOT TRADE

The product does not meet the requirements for trade. Depending on the situation, the supplier is given the opportunity to improve the product to such a degree that it can still be traded, or the product is destroyed.

FRESH

The state of the cut flower in which it looks fresh, showing healthy colour in flower and leaf, is not limp and shows no signs of ageing, as far as can be perceived by the eye.

HEEL

The undermost thickened and dark-coloured part of the stem which cannot easily absorb water.

LEAF POINT

Dying-off of plant cells on the top of a leaf larger than 2 mm.

OPENING

The first stage of the flower opening up.

PARASITES

All organisms which are harmful to the cut flower, such as insects, mildew/fungus, bacteria, viruses, etc. "100% free of animal and/or plant parasites" means that the product must be visually free of parasites. An exception to this rule applies to products which are traded with the designation "insect-free", whereby "100% free" truly means a zero tolerance policy.

RESIDUE AND/OR CONTAMINANTS

Residue from crop protection agents and/or lime residue and/or other deposits on flower- and leaf parts.

SHOOTS

The (generative) shoots which must be removed (disbudded) in some cases.

SHRINKER, SHRUNK FLOWER

Ethylene damage to the flower, causing it to wilt at an early stage.

VISIBLE REMNANTS OF MAIN FLOWER

Remnants of the (final stage of the) main flower after removal, rendering a negative influence on the ornamental value.

I. Minimum Requirements for Trade

Cut flowers may be traded if they meet the requirements below. Products which do not meet the requirements are not traded and are destroyed if necessary.

1 INTERNAL QUALITY

1.1 PRE-TREATMENT

- A quantity of cut flowers are required to be pre-treated. The product specifications indicate whether and which pre-treatment is required or recommended.
- Cut flowers without any further product specifications and supplied on water in a cut flower container must be pre-treated using pre-treatment containing the active ingredient sodium dichlorisocyanurate (code 11 on the label of the product), 1 tablet per 3 litres of water.

1.1.1 PRE-TREATMENT WITH STS

- Cut flowers standing in water with STS (STS solution) may not be brought in.
- Pre-treatment is verified by measuring the minimum concentration of STS in the flower bud in accordance with the VBN protocol "Verification of the pre-treatment of cut flowers".
- In connection with the environmentally harmful characteristics of silver, used STS solutions may not be dumped in surface water. The solution may not be dumped until it has been neutralised with the supplied neutralising agents. The neutralised solution may only be dumped via the sewer system. The sediment (residue) must be brought to government-designated sites (Small Chemical Waste Depot).

1.1.2 PRE-TREATMENT WITH CHLORINE OR ALUMINIUM SULFATE

- Cut flowers pre-treated with agents containing the active ingredient chlorine or aluminium sulphate must be supplied standing in water with pre-treatment agent.
- Pre-treatment is verified by taking samples of the supply water or by determining the bacteria count in accordance with the VBN protocol "Verification of the pre-treatment of cut flowers".

1.2 PENALTY

If the above requirements are not met, the auction imposes a penalty.

2 EXTERNAL QUALITY

2.1 MINIMUM QUALITY

- All cut flowers offered for sale must meet at least the requirements set for B1.value after trading and will retain this value for some time.
- All cut flowers must also be of such a quality that it can reasonably be expected that the flowers will still have ornamental value after trading and will retain this value for some time.
- Products that are offered for sale per bunch as unit of sale (instead of per stem) must comprise at least 3 branches/stems per bunch..

MATURITY

A distinction is made between cut flowers where a maturity code is mandatory, and cut flowers where a maturity code is not mandatory or does not exist.

2.2.1 *Cut flowers that require a mandatory maturity code.*

- The lowest minimum maturity requirement means that the inflorescence has to have reached minimum development as shown in photo stage 1.
- The greatest maximum maturity requirement means that the flowers should show no sign of ageing or of having finished flowering. This stage is more mature than what is shown in photo 5.

The table below is provided to illustrate this:

minimum maturity ↓	Can be traded					maximum maturity ↓
Not to be traded	Maturity stage 1	Maturity stage 2	Maturity stage 3	Maturity stage 4	Maturity stage 5	not to be traded

Note. These stages are in conformity with the reference photos at www.vbn.nl

2.2.2 Cut flowers that do not require a mandatory maturity code or do not have one.

- The lowest minimum maturity requirement means that the inflorescence must be sufficiently developed.
- The greatest maximum maturity requirement means that the flowers should show no sign of ageing or of having finished flowering.

II. Quality and Grading Criteria

1 QUALITY AND GRADING CRITERIA

1.1 QUALITY AND GRADING CRITERIA PER BATCH

Batches offered for auction must meet the requirements below (in order to be traded as A1).

- The batch must be of good internal quality.
- The batch must be fresh.
- The batch must be free of animal and/or plant parasites.
- The batch must be free of harmful effects and/or damage from animal and/or plant parasites.
- The batch must be free of damage and/or deficiencies and/or deviations and/or contamination in:
 - flower/inflorescence/bud;
 - branch/stem;
 - leaf/needle/thorn.
- The batch must be of good form, composition and flower and leaf colour.
- The undermost 10 cm of the stems must be free of leaves.
- The stems must be straight and sturdy enough to bear the flower.
- The batch must be uniform in colour, thickness, sturdiness and bouquet volume.
- The batch must be graded in the proper manner.
- The batch must be properly packed.

1.2 REQUIREMENTS AND QUALITY COMMENTS

If a batch shows a deviation from one or more of the mentioned requirements, the batch can be auctioned with a qualification (and pertaining inspection code). The seriousness of the deviation determines whether the batch is traded without a negative qualification, with a minor comment (an even inspection code) or with a serious comment (an odd inspection code). A comment is given on the basis of the tables below.

Table 1: negative comments for deviations from the requirements mentioned in Chapter 1.1, except for the deviations mentioned in Table 2.

no. stems in batch \ deviation	to a slight degree	to a heavy degree
less than 5%	no comment	minor comment
5 - 25%	minor comment	serious comment
more than 25%	serious comment	do not trade

Table 2: negative comments for deviations involving shrinkers, water stems, Botrytis, Botrytis leaf, miner leaf and freshness.

no. stems in batch \ deviation	to a slight degree	to a heavy degree
less than 5%	minor comment	serious comment
5% and up	serious comment	serious comment

An exception to the above holds for deviations from the maturity requirement in section 1.1 when products must be graded on the basis of maturity and the maturity stage must be specified in the grade code. In that case no inspection codes will be assigned.

1.3 SUPPLEMENTAL GRADING REQUIREMENTS PER BATCH

The following supplemental requirements apply to the grading of cut flowers if they are graded according to length, weight, maturity or another characteristic. The product specifications indicate which aspect serves as the basis for grading.

Table 1 (Chapter 1.2) applies to these requirements. If the grade differs 1 class, a slight or moderate deviation is indicated. A serious deviation is indicated in grades differing 2 or more classes. This does not hold for products that must be sorted on the basis of maturity and the maturity stage must be specified in the grade code. If, in those cases, the maturity is incorrectly specified in the grading code, this will be corrected and the auction may impose sanctions.

1.3.1 GRADING ACCORDING TO LENGTH

- Flowers are graded in length classes in increments of 5 cm as shown in Table 3.
- The maximum allowed difference in length between the shortest and the longest stem in one bunch is 3.0 cm.
- The stem is measured from where it was cut to the uppermost flower(bud) and the measured length is rounded down.
- The length grade can be given during trading in the grade code by using characteristics code S20, according to Table 3. The length of the shortest stem - rounded down - is indicated.

Table 3: grading according to stem length

minimum stem length	characteristics code S20
25 cm	025
30 cm	030
35 cm	035
40 cm	040
45 cm	045
50 cm	050
55 cm	055
60 cm	060
65 cm	065
70 cm	070
75 cm	075
80 cm	080
etc. in steps of 5	

1.3.2 GRADING ACCORDING TO WEIGHT

- Flowers are graded in weight classes of 1, 2, 5 or 10 grams, depending on the product.
- The weight grade can be mentioned during trading by in the grade code by using characteristics code S21.
- The average stem weight in the batch determines the grade to be indicated.

1.3.3 SORTING ON MATURITY

- Sorting on maturity can be noted in the sorting code by using the S05 reference. The spread of maturity within the lot is shown, whereby the second figure denotes the lowest maturity occurring in the lot (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5), while the third figure indicates the greatest maturity found in the lot (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).
- When maturity codes are being used, no inspection codes will be provided in reference to maturity or differences in maturity.
- With those products where the usual maturity coding is not applicable (for instance seed boxes), code 099 (not applicable) should be used.

1.3.4 GRADING ON THE BASIS OF AN OTHER CHARACTERISTIC

Depending of the product a grading according to other aspects may occur, such as number of buds, length of inflorescence, flower diameter, number of clusters or sheath length.

NUMBER OF FLOWER BUDS:

- Graded according to the number of flower buds in grading classes as shown in Table 4.
- If flowers are graded in a class with the designation "and up" (upgrading), on average 5 stems per bunch of 10 stems must then have more than the minimum number of buds.
- The number of flower buds can be mentioned during the trade in the grade code by using characteristics code S22. The code indicates the lowest number of buds per stem in the batch.

LENGTH OF INFLORESCENCE:

- Flowers are graded in classes in increments of 5 cm, as shown in Table 5.
- The length is measured from the point of attachment of the lowest flower(bud) up to the top of the inflorescence and rounded down.
- During trade the grade on length of inflorescence may be indicated by using characteristics code S29, according to Table 5. The length of the shortest inflorescence, graded down, is to be mentioned.

Table 4: grading according to number of flower buds

minimum no. of buds per stem	average no. of buds per stem	characteristics code S22
1	10	010
1 and up	15	015
2	20	020
2 and up	25	025
3	30	030
3 and up	35	035
4	40	040
4 and up	45	045
5	50	050
5 and up	55	055
etc.		

Table 5: grading according to length of inflorescence

minimum length of inflorescence	characteristics code S29
15 cm	015
20 cm	020
25 cm	025
30 cm	030
35 cm	035
40 cm	040
45 cm	045
50 cm	050
55 cm	055
60 cm	060
etc.	

2 QUALITY GROUPS BASED ON inspection CODES

Cut flowers can be traded in 3 quality groups: A1, A2 and B1, depending on the extent to which they meet the quality and grading criteria (see Chapter 1).

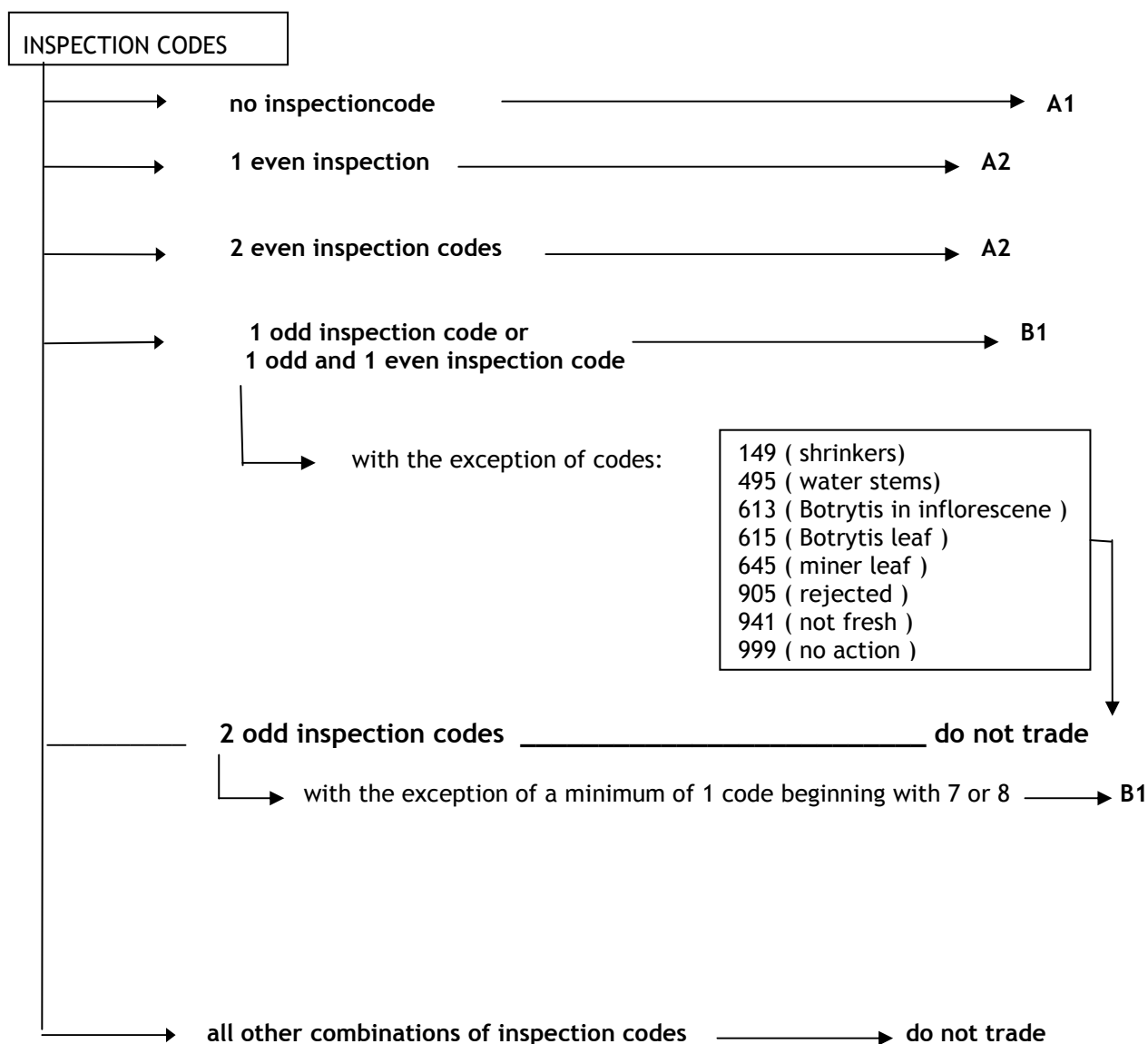
2.1 INSPECTION CODES

The degree to which the batch meets the quality and grading criteria is expressed in negative comments accompanying the batch. The comments are translated into a corresponding negative inspection code (characteristics codes K01 and K02) on the following basis:

comment	negative inspection code K01/K02
none	none
minor comment	even code
serious comment	odd code

2.2 DIVISION INTO QUALITY GROUPS

Depending on the inspection codes, cut flowers are divided into quality groups as follows:



the quality codes below are to be interpreted as even codes:	the quality codes underneath are to be interpreted as uneven codes:
117 flowers not at colour	148 single crimpers
123 discoloured flower edges	494 single water stalk
125 thumbs	612 single botrytis in inflorescence
133 stuck flowers	614 single botrytis on leaves
139 burst	
143 green edges	
163 open flower hearts	
165 open flower(tips)	
171 wet flowers	
179 discoloured flowers	
181 discoloured flower hearts	
415 deep in leaves	
417 double stalks	
427 bent branches/stalks	
431 twisted stalks	
447 small knots	
455 with leaves	
463 long flower stalks	
531 Point /cut leaves	
706 no sleeve	
715 incorrectly bunched	
717 incorrect sleeve	
733 poorly secured	
737 incorrectly packaged	
763 5 instead of 10 per bunch	
765 10 instead of 5 per bunch	
817 unequal in colour	
819 short	
839 unequal mixed	
867 insufficient mix	
919 light lot	
939 not in water	

3 GRADE CODE

Information about the grade is provided in the grade code by the use of characteristics codes. Indication of characteristics codes is mandatory or recommended, depending on the product. The Overview of Grade Codes for Cut Flowers (appendix to and part of these general specifications) shows per product which characteristics codes are to be indicated (compulsory or recommended) and on which position in the grade code.

The grade code may contain a maximum of 20 characteristics codes. While trading via auction clock only the characteristics codes on the first 4 positions will be shown.

III. Packing Requirements

1 GENERAL

- Cut flowers are delivered for shipment in cut flower containers or in boxes.
- Cut flowers must be supplied in packaging materials approved by the VBN.
- For cut flowers which are supplied standing in water in a container, clean drinking water (with the prescribed pre-treatment agents added to it) must be used. There must be sufficient water to prevent the flowers from becoming dry during the auction process. At the moment of inspection, a maximum of 5 cm water may be in the container. The water level is measured without the flowers in the container.
- A single-use box may not be used more than once.
- Products, including those with thorns, needles, hard branches and/or sharp leaf edges, and also products with (projecting) supporting materials must be packed so as to prevent the risk of any form of injury and/or damage to humans and/or the products' surroundings during sale
- Packaging must be chosen that properly protects the cut flowers during transport and sale in the rest of the chain.

2 LOADING

- Optimal loading must be realised, whereby the volume of the bunches determines the number of supplied bouquets per container unit.
- There must be at least 5 cm free space between the product and the tray above it in the stacking cart.

3 PENALTY

If cut flowers are not packed in accordance with the requirements, the auction reserves the right to impose a penalty.

IV. Identification Requirements

1 CONSIGNMENT NOTE

Every stacking cart must be accompanied by a fully and correctly filled-in consignment note containing at least the following information provided by the supplier:

- supplier information: company name, address, supplier's number
- auction or selling date
- number of container units
- number of pieces per container unit/packing unit
- VBN container code
- VBN product code: the code must be chosen which describes the product as accurately as possible
- grade code
- accompanying product description
- type of stacking cart: auction stacking cart or Danish container (if applicable)
- auction or product group (if applicable)
- positive quality comment (if applicable)
- method of trade.

2 PRODUCT LABEL

It is obligatory to label every packaging unit (e.g. bucket, box) with product and suppliers information, namely

- Suppliers number
- Variety name
- Amount (e.g. stems) per packaging (bucket, etc.)

It is advised to add the grading marks and the name of the supplier as well.

3 PRODUCT INFORMATION

Genetically modified products must be made identifiable as such by means of correct indication of their GM nature in the product information

4 PENALTY

If the above requirements are not met, the auction reserves the right to impose a penalty.

V. Recommendations

- We advise you to specify the maturity grade of cut flowers in the grade code (by using characteristics code S05 and only then if the product specifications contain no other guidelines for the use of the positions concerned in the grade code).
- If sleeves are used, hot needle-perforated or porous sleeves or foil with a sleeve thickness of 30 µm (P30) are recommended.
- In the case of products offered for sale per bunch, we advise to specify the minimum number of stems in the bunch in the grade code (by using characteristics code L11). We advise you to indicate the following text on the sleeves of cut flowers that are wrapped in a sleeve per bunch or per bundle: "This product is exclusively intended for decorative purposes and is not intended for internal use. In the event of incorrect use, consumption, contact and/or allergy the product may have harmful consequences for humans and/or animals".