

Floral foam, is there a viable alternative?



There is no escaping the growing consumer and media interest surrounding plastic waste and the negative implications on the environment. Consumers are waking up to the issues and are seeking products which reduce harm to the environment, and industry is responding. Companies are seeking alternatives to plastic packaging, but in many industries there is still a way to go until a long-term alternative is found.

But what about floral foam? Is there a viable alternative? The #nofloralfoam campaign is growing in momentum and champions alternatives to floral foam. We explore the trend and some of the alternatives available.

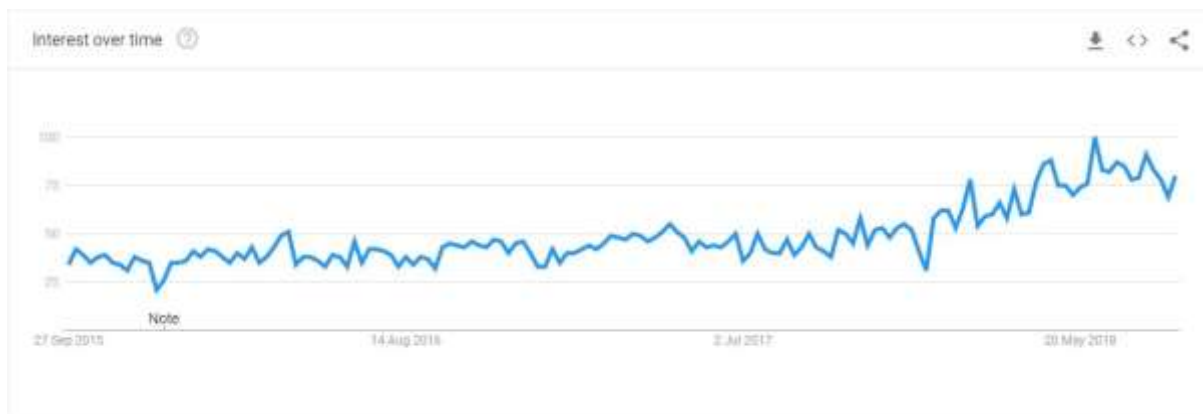
What is the issue with floral foam?

Floral foam, more commonly known as [Oasis](#) (brand name), is widely used in the industry as a foundation to floral arrangements which is easy to design in, holds your flowers in place and hydrates them for days on end. First discovered and manufactured in 1954 by Mr V.L Smithers, Oasis floral foam revolutionised the floral industry and has since been seen as an essential tool in the flower industry. So why is there a growing trend for ditching floral foam in the industry? Is there an ugly truth behind those beautiful blooms?

The amount of plastic used in the floral industry is alarming, from the amount of cellophane and gift wrap to the cable ties used in arrangements. But did you know that floral foam is one of the largest contributors to plastic waste in the industry? The original formula of floral foam is not bio-degradable and has an impact on landfill. Floral foam is essentially plastic, it is a petroleum-derived product, meaning it comes from a non-renewable resource, and is also made using chemicals such as carbon

black, formaldehyde and barium sulphates. The foam is also a single-use plastic, meaning that its life as a useful tool in floristry is minimal compared to its infinite lifespan in landfill.

In recent years there has been a growth in ethical purchasing and a growing awareness of the stories behind what purchases we make, whether that's around the impact of food waste, fast fashion or the non-recyclable nature of single use plastic. Following the release of the TV series Blue Planet II, which highlighted the scale of sea pollution, specifically plastic waste, consumers are much more aware of the impact their purchasing is having on the environment. In fact, [Google trends](#) show that interest in the topic 'plastic waste' has risen by a staggering 300% over the last 3 years (see image below). Hence, there is a growing and steady demand to reduce the use of single-use plastics and a growing trend in the florist community for avoiding floral foam all together.



In response to the landfill issue, Oasis have developed a product called OASIS Floral Foam Maxlife, which is said to be biodegradable in 567 days, depending on the conditions. But is this a reasonable response? Many florists are still aiming to go foam free.



#NoFloralFoam

A growing movement is aiming to open consumers' eyes to the negative implications of floral foam. The social media collective [@nofloralfoam](#) is growing in popularity. Contributing member Rita Fieldman believes:

“The likely negative environmental impact of floral foam in many respects overshadows the beauty of a bunch of flowers, no matter how pure the intention behind giving those flowers may be”.

The collective use social media to showcase, demonstrate and share techniques for achieving creative outcomes without the use of floral foam. It promotes images of artistic displays of blooms in place without the use of foam and shows what can be achieved with a little extra effort and creativity.

The movement is also being championed by many high-profile florists, most notably, Philippa Craddock – the Royal wedding florist, who used invisible buckets and tiny vials full of water all incorporated into the structure to keep the flowers at St. George's Chapel fresh during the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.

Princess Eugenie, a big environmental advocate, and her husband Jack opted for biodegradable Oasis Maxlife to be used in all their flower displays, due to environmental concerns.

Another Royal florist, Shane Connolly who designed the flowers for two royal weddings: the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall in 2005 and the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in 2011, also aims to reduce the environmental impact of floristry and chooses to rely instead on a good old-fashioned water, with chicken wire or a nest of twigs to give gentle support.

With high profile Royal weddings ditching floral foam, and receiving much press coverage surrounding this, awareness of the floral foam issue is higher than ever and is leading the foam free trend.

But what alternatives are available? Currently there is no product which directly replaces the ease of use of Oasis floral foam, and with the long period of time taken for Oasis Maxlife to biodegrade, the foam free trend is on the rise, which is generating a surge of creativity and innovation within the sector.

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-5753267/Royal-wedding-florist-reveals-display-kept-fresh-buckets.html>

What are some of the alternatives?

Chicken Wire

A popular method used prior to the development of floral foam was chicken wire, where a ball of chicken wire, secured with tape, provides support through inserting the stems through the wire. This was, and is returning to be, a particularly effective medium with which to create structures for flower arranging, due to the netted effect of its design allowing flowers to be easily pushed into and kept in a form and structure. Chicken wire can not only be used in floral bouquets but also in container style floral arrangements and larger structures.

Moss

Moss was a natural predecessor to floral foam. Moss can be soaked in water and formed in to pillows or balls and mounted to a shape, moss is widely regarded as a base in itself or – in larger displays – it can be attached to a metal structure.

Individual flowers can then be mounted and secured into the moss pad. [London Flower School](#) states:

“With the increasing prominence of 'green' floristry, working with moss is coming back into vogue – at least for arrangements that do not need to last longer than a few days. It is also true that combining moss pads with underlying chicken wire structures offers a new route to creating big arrangements for florists who want to avoid the time and effort of complex wirework”

Green Foliage

Using foliage as the "base" that peeks over the rim of the vase is also growing in popularity, and fits with the current trend for using foliage within flower arrangements. Once the opening of the vase is filled with the cut foliage, all the other flower stems can poke through and they will remain in place. Using pliable twigs like curly willow wrapped inside of the vase as a basket weave-like framework for other flower stems can also provide a solid base for the floral arrangement.

Pebbles

Pebbles and stones can also be used as an alternative to floral foam in certain arrangements. Inserting the stems into pebbles, gravel or marbles placed in the bottom 1/4 or 1/3 of a vase will provide a base for the arrangement.

Vases

The easiest way to avoid using floral foam is to select vases that don't need it. Floral arrangements in vases are becoming extremely popular. Selecting a vase that is as tall as it is wide will help to prevent the flower stems sliding up the sides or popping out of the vase. Arrangements that have been popular for many years are making way for a looser, more organic style of design. The looser style lends itself nicely to being designed without floral foam. With a narrow vase, arrangements can be made directly in water. Placing tape over the top of the vase to create a grid to place the stems through can also add stability.

The downside to some of the techniques above is the time taken and the differing techniques needed to work with new materials. However, the final results demonstrate the creativity which can be achieved with a little extra effort.

What are the next steps?

- **Research similar companies** and see if they are offering arrangements which do not require floral foam or are actively promoting the fact they do not use floral foam. Does this provide them with a competitive advantage?
- **Understand your customers** – are your customers concerned about the use of floral foam? Have you received any enquiries relating to floral foam? Are you missing out on customers who have moved to competitors marketing themselves as a more ethical business?
- **Think about your marketing messages** – Would promoting your business as a floral foam free business add a unique advantage to you marketing? Do you market yourself as an ethical business? Would going floral foam free help to underline this message?



- **Explore techniques** – take some time to research the different techniques, explore creative ideas and sources of inspiration, and experiment to see what outcomes you can achieve without floral foam.
- **Decide what is best for your business** – do you want to become completely floral foam free, or perhaps be able to offer this service if requested? Perhaps you may want to move to Oasis Maxlife as a compromise? Or are you content with using floral foam to achieve the results you desire. Decide what works for you and your existing and potential customers.
- **Consider collaboration** – is there a group of like-minded businesses you could collaborate with, including academia, on a long-term cluster led research project seeking to develop a solution to the floral foam problem?

What have we learnt?

The question still remains as to whether the floral industry can go completely foam free, however, it is worth exploring the alternatives. With consumers moving towards eco-friendly purchasing and with the interest in plastic waste on the rise, there is a need for the industry to respond. Whilst at present there is no direct replacement for floral foam, businesses should continue to research and experiment with new techniques. By beginning to understand new techniques and products now, businesses reduce the risk of being left behind when consumer demand for foam free arrangements increases. Take inspiration from the social media collective [@nofloralfoam](#) and use your creativity to see what outcomes you can achieve.

In order to support commercial cut growers in Wales to reach new markets, Tyfu Cymru recently facilitated training for Flowers From the Farm, and spend two days with the growers giving training on how to use social media to sell flowers and displays, pricing, business approaches and rounded off the training with a workshop on foam free floral displays.

If you're interested in working with other growers to collaborate in finding ways to reach new markets, please email

tyfucymru@lantra.co.uk