

About Royal FloraHolland

Information for your project

How do fresh flowers reach your home?

The flowers and plants you buy can come from every last corner of Europe, or even of the world. But how do these flowers and plants reach you at home? The flowers and plants go through a series of stages before they end up in a vase in your home.

Growers

The whole process from garden to vase starts with the grower. A grower runs a business where he/she cultivates flowers or plants. Once these products are mature enough to sell, they are harvested or picked, and packaged for sale. Flowers are placed in buckets with water, for example. Plants go into pots or a plastic tub. Then the products are stacked on special auction carts. These are known as auction trolleys or CC-containers. Then the products are ready to travel to auction.

Transport

Once the grower has picked and packed the flowers or plants, they are ready to go off to auction. But how do the flowers and plants get to the auction? Every day, thousands of auction carts are transported, with different kinds of flowers and plants. If a grower lives close to an auction center, then he may drive them using his own van or truck. There are also special trucks driving around The Netherlands that collect flowers and plants from growers and deliver them to the auction centers. These trucks are chilled, so that the flowers and plants remain fresher for longer.

Flowers and plants also arrive from abroad. These come to the auction center mainly by plane or truck. There are also other forms of transport, by sea and by train.

Cold storage

Once flowers and plants arrive at the auction center, where are the products stored? The auction center has large chilled storage rooms providing cold storage. In the cold storage rooms the temperature is kept between about five and eight degrees Celsius (41 to 46 degrees Fahrenheit), like the fridge in your home. If a flower is cold, then the flower will "hibernate". This means that the flower stays tightly closed, so it can be kept longer. Plants are not put into cold storage, they are simply placed in a normal storage room at the auction center.

Royal FloraHolland has the largest cold storage in the world in Naaldwijk. The cold storage area covers 52,000 square meters (560,000 square feet)!

Clock

Each day, hundreds of customers come and buy flowers and plants, starting at 6:00 am at one of the 35 Royal FloraHolland auction clocks. The information about the product currently being auctioned, such as the quantity, type, color, the grower's name etc. is displayed on the auction clock. Within just a few hours, the auction sells millions of flowers and plants. Every day, day after day.

Distribution

As soon as the products are sold, they go into a large hangar, the distribution hall. The auction carts are moved around the auction center using electric tractor units. These vehicles are powered by electricity so that the employees of the auction center are not exposed to exhaust fumes - and neither are the flowers and plants! The Royal FloraHolland distribution staff make sure that the products reach the customer who purchased them as soon as possible. This may be a customer who will resell the flowers and plants to foreign companies (an exporter), a customer who sells to Dutch companies (a wholesaler) or a florist who sells the flowers and plants through their own shop to you, the consumer.

Customers

Once the flowers and plants have reached the customer safely, then their final destination is one step closer, namely a vase or a flowerpot in your home. Some customers rent space in the auction buildings where they process the flowers and plants, for example to create beautiful bouquets. Other customers load the products they have bought into their own vans or trucks and drive them to their own shops.

Most of the flowers and plants purchased at Royal FloraHolland do not remain in The Netherlands. These products travel abroad by truck, plane, and train or by sea. The principal destinations are Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Belgium.

Consumers

The same afternoon, some of the flowers and plants will already be in shops, garden centers and DIY stores. For overseas destinations, a bit more time may be needed. The shop is the last chain in the link before the products arrive in the consumers' hands. This cycle is repeated every day, year in year out...

What is an auction?

If you buy something in a shop, like a can of coke, it has a fixed price. The price is shown on a price tag. If you auction a product, no one knows in advance how much you will need to pay for it. Weird? Not really, it is actually a very smart system. Just take a look at this example:

You are thirsty and you go to the supermarket to buy a can of coke. Suddenly the owner of the supermarket says, "from now on, I'm going to auction all my items." "That's fine, but I want to buy a can of coke", you reply. "You can do that," says the supermarket owner. "How much do you want to pay for it?" You know that you always have to pay 50 cents for a can of coke, and you say: "I've got 50 cents with me, and I want to buy the can for that." "That's fine," says the owner. "I'm happy to sell the can to you for 50 cents."

But then your neighbor comes into the supermarket and he is also thirsty. Your neighbor also wants to buy a can of coke. The problem is, there is only one can of coke left. "I'll pay you one euro for the can," says your neighbor to the owner of the supermarket. "I'm so horribly thirsty, and I really want that can." What do you think the owner of the supermarket will do? Of course, he will sell the can to your neighbor! The supermarket owner thinks you're a nice guy, and would have liked to sell you a can as well. But he will choose your neighbor because he wants to pay more money for the can of coke.

It also works the other way round. If you and your neighbor both want a can of coke and there are enough cans available in the supermarket, then you don't need to offer a high price. That is what we call "market forces."

The demand (how many people are thirsty) and the supply (how many cans the supermarket owner has) determine the price. When auctioning flowers it works differently. No one knows how much a bunch of flowers costs. Everyone who wants to buy flowers can say how much they want to pay for them. Only the person who offers the best price for the flowers will be able to buy them.

How does the clock work?

Flowers and plants are auctioned in a bidding room. The Dutch word for this "it's-mine-room" dates from the days when a customer wanted to buy a product they shouted out the word "mine". A bidding room is a room where the customers sit and from where they can see the Royal FloraHolland auction clocks. The customers sitting in the bidding rooms come there every working day at six in the morning to start buying products.

Different products are sold under each clock. Clock 1, for example, sells roses, and clock 2 chrysanthemums, clock 3 potted plants, and so on. The auction carries on until the point when all the flowers and plants for that day have been sold. In the Royal FloraHolland locations, there are a total of 35 auction clocks running each day. Selling more than 30 million flowers and plants per day.

Auction clock

The auction clocks were invented in the Netherlands in 1902. An auction clock looks like an ordinary clock face. There are numbers from 0 to 99 around the outside edge. The clocks nowadays do not have any hands, but are projected onto large screens on the wall. The information about the products being auctioned can be read on the clock display. This includes the quantity, the type, the color, the grower's

name etc. Within just a few hours, the auction sells millions of flowers and plants. Every day, day after day.

An auctioneer works with each clock. He is employed by the auction house and knows all about the flowers and plants, which are sold on this clock. During the auction he informs the customers about the products, which grower they come from and about the quality. Customers press a button if they want to buy the products. They tell the auctioneer over a buyer's phone how many they want to buy. The clocks are connected to a computer. The computer records which customer has bought which products and for how much.

Auctioning by reduction

Auctioning can be done in two ways, by raising the bid and by Dutch auction. Raising the bid is started at a low price. Each customer must offer more money than the last for the product. When no one wants to offer any more money, then the product is sold to the person who made the last bid. This method of auctioning is often used by auction houses where valuable items, such as paintings, are sold. Royal FloraHolland auctions by Dutch auction. Here you start the other way around, namely with a high price. The price on the clock drops continuously and the customer who is the first to say they want to buy the lot will get the flowers or plants. This is much quicker, and after all we are dealing with fresh products here.

When a new lot comes up for auction under the clock, the auctioneer sets the starting price for the flowers and plants. Then the red ball on the clock drops really fast to a lower number. The price of the flowers and plants therefore gets steadily cheaper. When a customer presses the button, the red ball stops. The figure where the red ball has stopped is the price for the lot of products that the customer has bought. The price is always per unit, so per stem (for cut flowers) or per plant.

Buying off the clock is a difficult job. The customer who is the first to press the button, buys the products. If you press too soon, then you pay too high a price. But if you are too late, then another customer will walk away with the flowers or plants that you wanted.

Image auctioning

In the Royal FloraHolland locations we make use of image auctioning. An image auction includes all the information about the cut flowers or plants on the projected clocks. The information includes the color, a photo of the product, the grower's logo, etc. The information on the clocks is reliable and complete enough that the flowers and plants do not need to be displayed physically under the clock. A major benefit of image auctioning is that the flowers and plants can be delivered to the customer directly from the cold storage once they are sold.

Remote purchases

The information nowadays is so detailed that customers no longer need to come to the auctions in order to buy products. The customer can follow the clock in the bidding room from their own computer. This type of buying is called remote purchasing. A major benefit is that the customer can buy from several auctions at the same time. Remote purchasing can be done from anywhere in the world; even though you may be in Russia, you can just buy products in The Netherlands while sitting at your desk.

Prices

For the grower every day presents the new challenge to see at what price his products are sold.

The price can be different every day. If there is a lot of demand for flowers and plants, the price will be high. Around St Valentine's Day, for example, red roses are in high demand by customers. This can lead to significantly rising prices.

But if there is a large supply of flowers and plants, the price can lower again.

For example, if the weather is good for several days in a row, flowers and plants will flower more quickly. The grower then has a lot of flowers and plants that are "ripe" for sale. This means there is a much wider choice of flowers at the auction, which means in turn that the customers bid lower prices than usual.

Spring is always the busiest time at Royal FloraHolland. Particularly in the run-up to special days like Valentine's Day and Mother's Day, a lot of flowers are sold. And plants for the garden also sell well in the spring.

What happens after the auction?

After the flowers and plants are bought in the auction room, the products are delivered to the customers. The products go on the conveyor belt to the distribution hall. Each customer has their own number, the number is also stuck on the empty auction cart that is ready and waiting. The distribution staff wear headphones. A computerized voice message tells them over their headphones, which empty auction cart they need to drive to and how many buckets the customer with this auction cart has bought. Some customers have their own packing rooms on the auction site, which is known as a box. A tractor driver takes the flowers and plants to the box. Other customers come to auction with their own car with a trailer, or a truck. They load up the purchased products themselves.

All around the world the same day

Around eighty percent of all the flowers and plants that are bought at Royal FloraHolland, go abroad. The major countries to which they are exported are Germany, England, Belgium and France. The former East European countries are becoming more important, for example the Czech Republic and Poland. In Europe, flowers and plants are mainly transported by truck. For destinations outside Europe the flowers may, for example, be transported by plane through Schiphol airport. Within a day, the flowers and plants are for sale in shops all around the world.

Another form of transport is by sea. The flowers and plants are stored in large sea-going containers. They are carried around the entire world in large vessels. This form of transport is becoming more and more frequent. Another mode of transport is by railway. The products are transported in refrigerated containers.

Cleaning up

Once all the flowers and plants that were sold have been delivered to the customers, the auction center is empty again. Then everything gets cleaned. Not just the bidding rooms and the halls, but also the auction trolleys are cleaned. At the auction center there is a special washroom to give the flower buckets and cases a good wash. The flower buckets of course need to be thoroughly cleaned before they are once again filled with newly arrived flowers from growers. The auction rooms are not left idle after the auction, distribution and cleaning. In the afternoon and evenings, growers arrive again at the auction center to deliver their products. These products will be auctioned the following morning, early, once more.

What is import?

There are also growers who do not live in the Netherlands, but still sell their flowers and plants through Royal FloraHolland. The flowers and plants from abroad, for example from Africa, are flown to the Netherlands by plane in cartons. Here the flowers are unpacked and placed in buckets with water. The next day the products are auctioned under the clock.

Each day, flowers and plants arrive from more than sixty different countries at Royal FloraHolland's different locations. The imported flowers mainly come from warmer countries like Kenya, Ethiopia and Israel. You might think that flowers would be damaged if they are packed tightly into a large carton, without water. However, most flowers can survive this easily. It is in fact better to pack them tightly into a carton because the less they move around, the less they are damaged in transit. In addition, the time that the flowers are kept in a carton is as short as possible. The flowers are packed up just before they are loaded into the plane. As soon as they arrive in Schiphol, they are sent directly to the auction center and unpacked again.

Top 10 import countries

1. Kenya
2. Ethiopia
3. Israel
4. Belgium
5. Germany
6. Spain
7. Italy
8. Zimbabwe
9. Denmark
10. Ecuador

The birth of a new flower

Did you know that every year between 1,200 and 1,500 new flowers and plants are created in The Netherlands? Growers develop new flowers and plants in order to keep up with trends. A grower, for example, may want to improve the quality of his products, such as larger flowers, more leaves or longer lasting. Before a new flower or plant is brought to market, there is a whole process to go through. It takes a long time to create a new flower or plant, around five or six years.

Breeding

To create a new flower or plant you have to begin with breeding.

Let's assume: there are no orange roses yet, and you want to create them. You create orange by mixing red and yellow, just as you do with paint. You put red roses and yellow roses in your glasshouse. When the flowers are blooming, you take a bit of pollen from a red rose. You put the pollen on a yellow rose, this pollinates the yellow rose. Then you wait until the bush starts flowering again. Because the yellow roses were pollinated by the red roses, the new flowers should be a bit more orange. You need to keep pollinating for as long as it takes until the flowers are the color that you want. Because you need to wait each time until the bush flowers again, it can take years.

Propagating

When finally you have a bush with the right color of roses, you need to create more bushes from that bush. This is called propagation. What you actually want is a glasshouse full of orange roses. You need to take cuttings and just hope that the bushes that grow from the cuttings will have the same orange roses as the first bush. So someone who practices breeding and propagation needs to have a plenty of patience!

Plant hunters

There are people who have made it their profession to discover new flowers and plants. These people are known as "plant hunters". The plant hunters search everywhere for beautiful, crazy, nice flowers and plants. For instance in the wild, in nature. When they find something, then they go to a breeder to get multiple samples of it. Sometimes some really lovely new flowers and plants are created. A grower may have a strange, misshapen flower standing among his flowers. He can pull it out and then grow others from it.

Names

A new flower or plant of course has to be given a name. A name consists of the genus (for example "rose") and the type (such as "large-flowered"). After that, a breeder can then also add an invented name. Some growers choose the name of their wife or children. There are also growers who name their new flower after a famous person, such as the "Maxima" tulip. By naming it for a famous person, the breeder hopes to get newspaper coverage, this makes the flower better known and more of it will sell.

What is a cooperative?

A cooperative means that the company is made up of members, like in a sports club. Royal FloraHolland is a primary cooperative. The members decide what does or does not happen. Royal FloraHolland has a total of 6,000 members both in The Netherlands and overseas. The growers came up with the idea of selling their products in the same place. This meant that most customers also came to that place. This meant that the growers could sell more products at a higher price. These growers then set up a company together, a cooperative. They sell their products as a cooperative, but they grow everything separately.

Organization

Nine members are elected to the Supervisory Board, from all the growers who are members of the Royal FloraHolland cooperative. The Supervisory Board of Royal FloraHolland ensures that everything is properly managed for the members (the growers). Royal FloraHolland has divided The Netherlands into a number of areas we refer to as regions. There are a total of 15 regions, although Germany is also often included as a region. The growers in a region agree among themselves who the members of the regional board are. Royal FloraHolland cannot deal personally with each grower. That is why Royal FloraHolland regularly speaks with the growers' representatives, the regional boards.

Members Council

Royal FloraHolland has a Members' Council. Its aim: to increase the engagement of members and stimulate the discussion of cooperative themes among members, the Management Board and the Supervisory Board. The Members' Council consists of members from the Flower and Plant Advisory Committees.

The sites and their history

Royal FloraHolland has four locations in The Netherlands and one location in Germany. These sites each have their own history. Below, you will find some more information about each site and its history.

Aalsmeer

Royal FloraHolland Aalsmeer is an export auction where many different types of flowers and plants are auctioned. They are auctioned across thirteen clocks. The location is well known for the smart, modern techniques that it uses during the auction work. Many companies who are involved in trading, exporting and processing flowers and plants have their own area on the Royal FloraHolland site. For smaller customers, who do not buy from under the clock, the Aalsmeer site has a Cash & Carry for flowers and plants. Think of it like a supermarket. You can view, buy and walk out with the products.

The first auctions were held in Aalsmeer in 1911. For many years there were two separate auction rooms: C.A.V. in Aalsmeer village and Bloemenlust in eastern Aalsmeer. In 1972, these two auction houses decided to merge. From then on, together they formed the 'Verenigde Bloemenvailing Aalsmeer' (United Flower Auctions of Aalsmeer) also known as the VBA. Over time, more and more flowers and plants were sold, so the building kept being expanded. Now, the building is 12 times larger than it was in 1972. With a size of 220 soccer fields, the Bloemenvailing Aalsmeer is now the largest flower auction in the world. Look it up in the Guinness Book of Records.

On 1 January 2008: FloraHolland merged with Bloemenvailing Aalsmeer. The name FloraHolland was retained and the Aalsmeer logo (the orange tulip) was added.

Naaldwijk

The Naaldwijk site is located in the middle of the Westland area between The Hague and Rotterdam. Westland is the largest growing region in the world for growing ornamental plants. Naaldwijk is also known as the glass city. This is because the Naaldwijk site is located among dozens of glasshouses. Many large companies have set up in this area, because they sell a lot overseas. The Naaldwijk site has two bidding rooms with a total of ten auction clocks. The Naaldwijk site also has a Cash & Carry.

On 2 March 1923, the Centrale Westlandse Snijbloemenvereniging (C.W.S.) was established. The turnover on the first day of auction was 304.59 guilders. The C.W.S. rented a building in Poeldijk. In 1923, there were about 75 growers who were members of the auction. There was a single auction clock.

On 30 March 1931, the decision was taken to convert the auction association into a cooperative. From then onwards, the auction was known as the Coöperatieve Centrale Westlandsche Snijbloemenvereniging (C.C.W.S.). It was decided to locate the auctions permanently in the Dijkweg in Honselersdijk, the place where the Naaldwijk site can still be found today.

In 1971, a small quantity of foreign flowers were sold on the clock for the first time. In 1976, two clocks were added for the auctioning of pot plants. This put an end to the auctioning of flowers and pot plants on the same clock.

Rijnsburg

At the Rijnsburg site many cut flowers are traded, mainly bulb flowers and summer flowers. There is one bidding room with seven auction clocks. In Rijnsburg you will find many large and medium-sized companies who sell overseas.

In 1914, seventeen growers set up Bloemenveiling Flora in Rijnsburg. Initially, the auctions were held in the local café. It was only in 1917 that an actual auction building began to be used in Rijnsburg. Bulb flowers, and above all tulips have been important products for Bloemenveiling Flora right from the start. From about 1927, other flowers gradually began to be auctioned.

In the early 70s, Bloemenveiling Flora had grown to the point that it needed more land for new buildings. This was not possible at the old auction building location, so a move was necessary. In 1980, the new auction complex was brought into use. It is located outside Rijnsburg, on the border with Oegstgeest, the place where the Rijnsburg site can still be found today.

Eelde

Eelde is the smallest Royal FloraHolland site. In Eelde you will also find many customers from Germany. Eelde has a separate shop for tree nursery products, such as bushes, trees and shrubs. The Eelde site has one bidding room with three auction clocks.

In 1927, flowers were auctioned for the first time in the north of the country, in Groningen. The auction at the time was called 'Bloemenveiling 't Noorden' (Flower auctions in the North). The auction house moved twice within Groningen, in 1936 and again in 1948. In 1978, the auction moved to Eelde, where the Eelde site is still found today.

Initially Venlo auctions, now Rhein-Maas auctions

In 2011, FloraHolland Venlo merged with Landgard Herongen and Landgard Lüllingen under the name 'Veiling Rhein-Maas.' (Auction Rhein-Maas) In addition to Dutch customers, you will find many customers from Germany as well in Herongen. This is due to the fast connection to the largest export country, Germany. Venlo has eight auction clocks; six clocks where flowers and plants are on display, and two clocks with image auctions, in a single bidding room.

In 1915, the Coöperatieve Veiling-Vereeniging (CVV; Cooperative Auction Association) was set up in Blerick. At the time, only vegetables and fruit were auctioned. From 1916, eggs too! Selling flowers through the CVV started in 1962 when a chrysanthemum grower turned up at the auction. His flowers were auctioned under the vegetable clock, because there was no clock for flowers yet. Many growers then started to grow flowers instead of vegetables. In this way, a genuine flower auction was gradually created.

A year later, there were already so many flowers being auctioned at the CVV that a separate flower hall was built in Grubbenvorst. This is where the Venlo site is still located today. The new auction complex opened in 1965. Sadly, on 30 April 1969, the building was destroyed in a fire. Luckily, the CCWS flower auctions from Honselersdijk (which has now become the Naaldwijk site) came to the rescue, and the next day there were auctions under the vegetable clock. A few years later, a separate flower auction hall was reconstructed.

After a number of mergers, the CVV auctions finally combined in 1991 with the 'Coöperatieve Venlose Groenten veiling' (Cooperative of Venlo Vegetable auctions.) They continued under the name 'Coöperatieve Veiling Zuidoost-Nederland' (Cooperative Auctions of South-East Netherlands) abbreviated as 'ZON' auctions (SUN in Dutch).

Mergers: FloraHolland

In the past, there were a large number of auctions, both large and small. The smaller auctions have disappeared for the most part. From the '60s onwards, there were also many auctions merging with each other. FloraHolland consists of a long list of different companies that merged together:

- 1972: C.A.V and flower auctions Bloemenlust merged as 'Bloemenveiling Aalsmeer' (Aalsmeer flower auctions).
- 1987: C.C.W.S. and the 'Bloemenveiling Berkel en Omstreken', became the flower auctions 'Bloemenveiling Westland' and 'Bloemenveiling Berkel.' In 1992 both auctions merged completely and continued under the name 'Bloemenveiling Holland'.
- On 1 January 2000: 'Bloemenveiling 't Noorden' and 'Bloemenveiling Flora' merged as 'Bloemenveiling Flora.'
- On 1 January 2002: 'Bloemenveiling Flora' and 'Bloemenveiling Holland' merged as FloraHolland.
- On 1 July 2002: The flower part of 'ZON' auctions merged into FloraHolland
- On 1 January 2008: FloraHolland merged with 'Bloemenveiling Aalsmeer'. The name FloraHolland was retained and the Aalsmeer logo (the orange tulip) was added.
- 2008: The agency office 'Bloemenveiling Holland' merged in 2008 with the agency office 'Bloemenveiling Aalsmeer' under the name FloraHolland Connect.
- On 24 January 2011: FloraHolland Venlo merged with the German Landgard Herongen and Landgard Lüllingen, under the name 'Veiling Rhein–Maas'
- On 20 July 2011, the auction had existed for 100 years and was awarded the Royal designation. The auctions in The Netherlands then continued together as one Royal FloraHolland.

Nice to know

Did you know that...

- Every working day a good 30 million flowers and plants are sold at Royal FloraHolland.
- Around 60 percent of the global trade in flowers and plants passes through the Dutch auctions. In The Netherlands, around 95 percent of all flowers and plants are sold by Royal FloraHolland.
- The auctions in The Netherlands use a total of 12 million flower buckets, 5.5 million plant trays and 800,000 flower cartons.
- The cold storage in the Aalsmeer site is larger than all the freezers and fridges in Aalsmeer.
- There are at least 20,000 different flowers and plants? And every year another 1,200 – 1,500 new products are added. Some varieties also disappear.
- Now and again, exotic animals are found in the flowers and plants that arrive from abroad. For example, a tarantula was found once, a poisonous tree frog, a twelve centimeter (five inch) long grasshopper and a lizard. When this happens, the auction site calls for an animal ambulance to come and pick up the animals. The animal ambulance people then find a good home for the exotic animals.
- Flowers and plants also often have a symbolic meaning. The branch of an olive tree represents peace and reconciliation. A blue violet stands for hope. Red roses signify love. The lily is the symbol of innocence.
- Anyone who thinks of The Netherlands, thinks of windmills, clogs and tulips. But did you know that tulips do not really come from The Netherlands at all? They originally came from Turkey. The tulip arrived in The Netherlands in the 16th century. Tulips have always been popular flowers. Around 1600-1637 there was even an outbreak of "tulip mania". Bulbs changed hands for extremely high prices. The most expensive bulb cost between 3,000 and 4,200 guilders, about EUR 1,900. In 2009, FloraHolland auctioned 1.5 billion tulips.
- The oldest products that Royal FloraHolland sells are bonsai trees. When Royal FloraHolland sells them, they can be as old as 50 or 60 years. The youngest product that is sold at auction is the iris. This flower is ready for auction after just four weeks in the glasshouse.

- Aalsmeer has a special flower shuttle, the only one in the world. This transfers flowers and plants across the road in just 6 minutes.
- The Naaldwijk and Aalsmeer sites have their own fire brigade with a fire engine.
- Flowers and plants can now also be transported by train and boat.

A visit?

Now you know a lot about the auctions, but once you see it for yourself, it all becomes much clearer, of course. You are welcome to visit! The visitor centers at three auctions are open in the morning. If you want to see a lot, you will need to arrive very early. View the website (www.royalfloraholland.com) for information about opening hours. Only the Aalsmeer site is open to visitors.

Good luck with your presentation, and see you soon!