



THE GOLDEN SLATE

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Surviving the Year Teaching Floral Design in a Portable Classroom

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They told us we had to move out of our classroom and into a portable by the end of the school year because the ag department was the next section of modernization on our campus. Moving out of our classrooms also meant moving out of our “floral shop,” which had a 10 x 20 walk-in cooler, tall tables, and plenty of room to make a mess. My first thought was, “How are we going to do everything?” I already had three wedding inquiries for that summer and fall, and we likely had 125 Flower of the Month subscriptions to fill in the new school year. How were we supposed to do all of that without our floral cooler? To say I was in a panic was an understatement.

With construction moving quickly across campus, there was no certainty about when we would be back in our space. Meanwhile, people were asking how we would make it work and were eager to sign up for monthly flower subscriptions—my anxiety was through the roof. I had to pass on participating in different events and worried about how we would maintain nine sections of floral design without a floral cooler.

Fast forward to August, when the district asked us to host a floral workshop during the district professional development day. Without a proper place to store flowers, we pivoted to Plan B—something I was starting to think might become my theme for the year. Then, five days before school started, Christmas arrived early in the form of a retrofitted shipping container that would become our new floral cooler. It was not as large as our walk-in, and it was definitely not something you could simply walk into. It sat about three inches off the ground, which became obstacle number one. Obstacle number two was the floor. Instead of being solid, it was slatted, and the gaps were wider than the wheels on nearly all the carts we used inside the cooler. Still, I reminded myself to be grateful...we had a floral cooler.

My first priority was finding a ramp and some type of flooring so I could move carts in and out without risking a hernia. Thankfully, our ag mechanics teacher came to the rescue by

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building a ramp and providing wood we could use for the floor. With that, obstacle number one and obstacle number two were officially handled.

Now, as mentioned earlier, our floral shop had enough room to make a mess and fit our design tables so we could work inside with at least 30 students. So where would we make our arrangements now? Would we have to work outside? What about the weather? Panic took over again until, thankfully, we were given an empty portable to use as our temporary shop.

It was a temporary space with carpet and an air conditioner that did not always work. Some of the challenges with working in the portable were the lack of storage and the carpet that was going to be a disaster to clean up. In our floral shop, we had space to store vases and containers, and everything had a place. Now we had a big empty rectangle, but I had to be thankful because we had a big empty rectangle, and it was all ours.

September arrived, and we were ready to make our first Flower of the Month arrangements. I was nervous about how it would go. Our first Flower of the Month arrangements went off without a hitch, and we were able to make it work with what we had. Were there minor challenges? Yes. The carts we use to hold the buckets and arrangements were difficult to move in and out of the portable. With questionable air conditioning, we were often working in an uncomfortable environment. If I had arrangements on the carts and took them out of the shipping container, some would fall off the cart, so each student had to move their arrangement individually. Staying organized with our tools and materials was cumbersome as well. Things disappeared more easily in the portable, and tasks seemed to take a little longer than they did before.

What would I say to someone facing this situation? Be patient and be thankful. Every day as I walked past that big, ugly shipping container and struggled to pull open its heavy doors, I took a deep breath and reminded myself to be grateful. Has it been difficult? Yes. Has it been a workout? Yes. Has it been a learning experience? Yes. Will it help me appreciate the space I have when we go back? Yes.

My classroom is now ready. However, the floral shop and cooler won't be available, as that space is connected to the electricity of other classrooms still far from completion. This year, we will again be working out of a portable classroom with a makeshift shipping container cooler, and we are making it work. That is what we do as agriculture teachers: we turn challenges into opportunities and make the impossible possible.

