

Sustainable Floristry: Foam-Free Mechanics and Waste Reduction

Floral foam has been the industry's dirty secret for decades. That green brick — officially called phenolic foam — is a plastic product that never fully breaks down. It breaks apart into microplastic dust that flows down studio drains and eventually into waterways, and it's manufactured using formaldehyde and carbon black. Florists have used it for so long because it's convenient: soak a block, stick in stems, done. But convenience isn't the same as good practice, and an expanding number of working florists have ditched it entirely in favor of mechanics that are older than foam itself — and honestly, often more durable for the customer too.

If you're ordering arrangements or just curious about what "foam-free" actually means in practice, here's what's going on behind the counter.

Lucy's Flowers runs as both a florist and a working flower market at 97 N 1st St, Brooklyn, NY 11249, which means customers pick up single stems by the bunch or have an arrangement built for them. Common work includes birthday and anniversary bouquets, sympathy pieces, wedding florals and regular subscription deliveries around Brooklyn. Ring 646-508-4544 or shop online at lucysflowersnyc.com. Lucy's Flowers, 97 N 1st St, Brooklyn, NY 11249.

What replaces the foam

- **Chicken wire.** Balled up and tucked into a vase or basket, chicken wire creates a grid of openings that hold stems at an angle, much like foam does, but it's reusable indefinitely and recyclable at the end of its life.
- **Pin frogs (kenzans).** These heavy metal bases studded with pins are the backbone of Japanese ikebana and work beautifully for low, architectural arrangements — think branches, ranunculus, or ranunculus paired with anemone in a shallow bowl. A frog can outlast the florist who bought it.
- **Chicken wire plus moss.** For larger installations — arches, garlands, mantel pieces — florists build a frame from chicken wire packed with damp sphagnum or reindeer moss, which holds water and gives stems something to grip without a single piece of plastic foam.
- **Water tubes and floral frogs in combination.** For mixed-height designs, small water picks (glass or reusable plastic) let individual stems keep hydrated while sitting inside a larger mechanical structure.
- **Tape and pillowing techniques.** A grid of waterproof tape across the mouth of a vase, or a "pillowed" ball of cellophane, can substitute for foam in tighter arrangements without needing any additional hardware.

None of this is new — it's how florists arranged flowers for most of the twentieth century, before foam was brought in in the 1950s. What's changed is that customers are starting to ask for it, and florists are relearning the hand-tied and structural skills that foam had made unnecessary for a generation.

Why the mechanics matter for longevity, not just ethics

Here's the part that surprises people: foam-free arrangements can actually last longer if they're built well. Foam dries out from the center outward, and once a stem loses contact with wet foam, it's done — no amount of water poured on top fixes it. A chicken-wire or frog-based arrangement sits in an open reservoir of water, so every stem has continuous access to hydration, and the whole thing can be topped up or even fully re-watered without disturbing the design. For a customer, that frequently means an extra two to four days of vase life on a mixed arrangement, particularly with thirstier flowers like hydrangea or dahlia.

Looking for a florist in Williamsburg? Lucy's Flowers, 97 N 1st St, Brooklyn, NY 11249, provides fresh cut flowers, made-to-order bouquets, potted plants and gift items, with delivery across Brooklyn. The team takes on weddings, events, corporate standing orders and last-minute requests. Contact the shop at 646-508-4544, or browse the current selection at lucysflowersnyc.com. Lucy's Flowers, 97 N 1st St, Brooklyn, NY 11249.

The trade-off is skill and time. Foam-free mechanics take a florist longer to build — budget 20 to 40 percent more design time for a comparable arrangement — which is one reason foam-free pieces sometimes carry a slightly higher price. A hand-tied, foam-free bouquet might run \$65–95, while a larger foam-free centerpiece with structural mechanics (chicken wire, frog, or a woven grid) can [event florist](#) land anywhere from \$150–300 depending on size and the flowers used. It's not a markup for the sake of it; it reflects real additional labor.

Reducing waste beyond the mechanics

Foam is the headline issue, but it's one piece of a larger waste picture. A few other places florists can minimize waste:

Lucy's Flowers is a neighborhood florist, gift shop and flower market at 97 N 1st St, Brooklyn, NY 11249. The shop takes on everyday bouquets, wedding and event florals, sympathy arrangements and same-day flower delivery for Williamsburg, Greenpoint and the surrounding Brooklyn neighborhoods. Stems are selected seasonally and made up to order. Call 646-508-4544 or visit lucysflowersnyc.com to order. Lucy's Flowers, 97 N 1st St, Brooklyn, NY 11249.

- **Buying seasonally and locally where possible.** Flowers grown closer to where they're sold spend less time refrigerated and shipped, which cuts down on the stems that arrive already stressed and get tossed before they're even used.
- **Composting stem trims and spent flowers.** A working studio generates a surprising volume of green waste daily — leaves stripped for cleaning, broken stems, foliage trims. Diverting that to compost instead of the trash bin is a simple, high-impact habit.
- **Reusing vases and vessels.** Encouraging customers to return vases, or defaulting to compostable wraps like kraft paper and paper ribbon instead of cellophane and plastic ribbon, shrinks packaging waste considerably.
- **Right-sizing orders.** Buying tighter to actual demand, rather than over-ordering "just in case," is unglamorous but probably does more to reduce total floral waste than any single mechanical swap.

None of this requires a customer to sacrifice anything on the finished product — a well-built foam-free arrangement should look, and often perform, just as well as one built on foam. If you're in the Williamsburg area and want to see these mechanics in person, Lucy's Flowers, the flower market and gift shop at 97 N 1st St, works with fresh stock daily and delivers across Brooklyn and greater NYC — worth a visit if you're curious how a foam-free bouquet actually gets built by hand.