

Q&A WITH...

Lizzie Newcombe, Interflora's Florist of the Year 2022 – the UK's best florist!



1. What advice would you give someone who is picking flowers for an occasion such as a wedding?

It's always a good idea to use the seasons to your advantage and go with what's growing at that time. You should have a chat with your florist and see what they recommend for that time of year and then work out what will work alongside your theme and colours.

2. What is the best way to keep flowers looking fresh in your home?

I always recommend that my customers change the water in their vase every couple of days, give the vase a quick clean and recut the stems, especially in the warmer weather. I'd also make sure you keep them away from any heat sources.

This can make a whole world of difference and will absolutely help you get the most out of your blooms.

3. Tell us your top floristry tips...

Try and buy flowers from your local florist and build a relationship with them!

Not only are you supporting local businesses and specialist growers when buying flowers from a florist on the high street, but you're also getting expert advice from a professional.

Try and buy seasonal, too, as you'll get the best quality and value for money.

4. How did you get into floristry and what is the best part of working with a brand like Interflora?

I was always creative and I remember being around 15 and thinking 'I'd love to have my own florist one day!' – so I enrolled on a course with my local college and started working in a local florist shop.

I'm now lucky enough to have my own shop in Surrey, and although it's a lot of hard work with lots of early starts at the market and late nights with admin duties, I can't picture doing anything else.

My career developed as I began working on event installations in London and I now compete in floristry competitions, too. Winning the much-coveted Gold Medal at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show and the title of Best in Show, along with RHS Young Chelsea Florist of the Year 2019 is something I'm very proud of.

The best part of working with a brand like Interflora is the fantastic opportunities and support they provide local florists with. I get to show off my skills and meet other creatives, like when I represent the UK in the Interflora World Cup 2023 this September. Florists from around the world will meet in Manchester for the world's most prestigious floristry competition. Imagine the Olympics crossed with the Chelsea Flower Show, then add extra drama!

It brings together exceptional florists from around the globe to compete, creating the most stunning floral art.

HERO HOUND

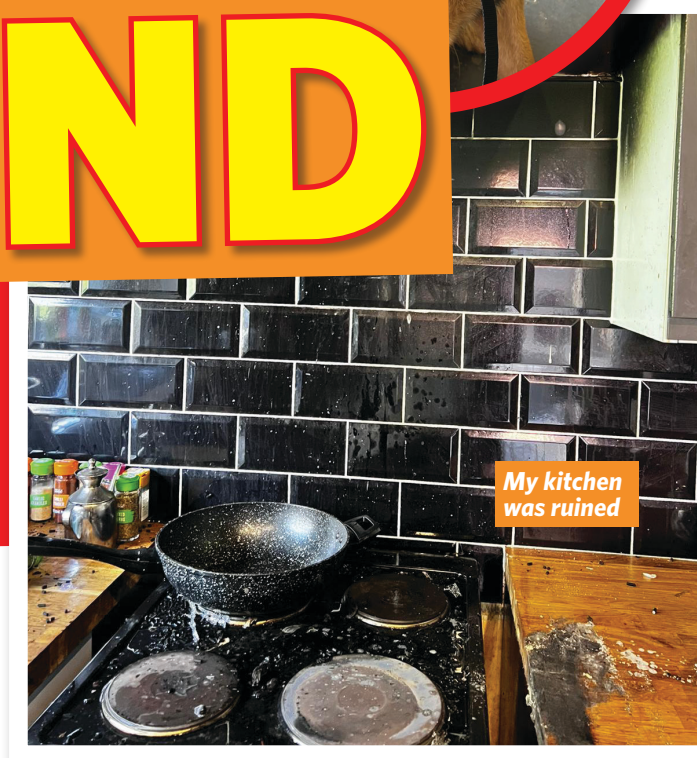
Melody Chen, 19, from Stoke, escaped a grisly fate when her assistance dog came to the rescue...



FLAMING REAL LIFE



Mia is a true lifesaver!



My kitchen was ruined

Walking downstairs to the kitchen, my belly was rumbling.

It was a Friday before college in March this year and I was going about my routine.

As much as I loved my animal management classes, I couldn't wait for the weekend! Pottering over to the stove, I pulled out a frying pan.

Cracking a couple of eggs, I decided to sort my toast once my scrambled eggs were done.

And voila! My usual breakfast would be complete.

As I started cooking, my assistance dog Mia – a beautiful German Shepherd – circled around my feet.

It often felt like we lived

alone as my housemate was usually out working on call as a local electrician.

I bent down and stroked Mia's smooth fur – she was waiting for her breakfast, too!

Having been diagnosed with Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS) in January 2022, I struggled with fainting and unexpected low blood sugar.

With them at risk of dropping at any time, I had to eat first to keep them stable.

'Sorry Mia,' I said. 'You'll have to wait for yours.'

Only, my phone started beeping in the living room.

That must be my blood glucose sensor! I thought.

I strolled into the living room to check, leaving Mia alone in the kitchen.

Suddenly, a wave of dizziness passed over me and everything faded to black.

The next thing I knew, the gruff sound of Mia barking rang in my ears.

Blinking, I couldn't see beyond her black snout in my face as she licked me frantically.

'What's wrong, Mia?' I said groggily.

But she continued barking at me, even tugging the sleeve of my jumper in a panic.

Suddenly, an all-consuming horror

shook through me as I started coming to my senses.

The whole room was filled with huge clouds of smoke.

'Come on Mia!' I said, coughing as the smoke began to fill my lungs.

Getting up, my whole body was so weak as I staggered out of the living room.

Thick clouds of black smog billowed out of the kitchen.

A tall, red flame blasted up towards the ceiling, licking at the extractor fan.

But I could barely see beyond the stifling smoke!

Mia barked again, snapping me back into reality.

We swiftly fled into the garden – my vision hazy and I couldn't stop spluttering from the smoke.

As I stood outside, taking in the horrific sight of black clouds escaping out of my windows, the fire alarm blared from inside the house.

Shaken, I instantly rang the fire brigade.

'There's been a fire!' I told them, explaining how Mia had guided me out of the building.

'Are you alright?' a passerby

yelled over the garden fence.

After I nodded, completely out of it, he moved on.

To the outside eye, one would think I'd had an accident in the kitchen.

With only smoke escaping from the windows, the flames inside weren't visible.

Ringling my housemate, my words were jumbled as I explained what had happened.

'I'm coming straight home, don't worry,' he said, leaving work in that very moment.

Within 10 minutes, a glaring red fire truck pulled up and firemen jumped out.

They instantly rushed into the house to tackle the climbing live flames.

A paramedic had also arrived to give me a once over – my heart rate was jumping frantically and I was shaking.

She told me that I'd likely passed out because my blood sugar levels dropped too low.

While I'd trained Mia to detect medical emergencies,

Mia was only a baby but she saved my life

she'd never seen a fire before! She was only a baby, too, at just over one year old, but her natural instincts to protect me had kicked in.

I was so impressed with her for noticing the rising danger of my silly scrambled eggs catching on fire.

'Your dog is so clever,' the paramedic told me, pointing at Mia's assistance dog collar. 'She's a true hero.'

I was filled with pride – Mia had saved my life after all!

Talking to the fire brigade, I was informed that the main cause of the fire was the oil in the pan, which had been left to get too hot.

Stepping inside the house, my heart sank as I observed the destruction.

My wooden countertops were burned to a crisp and egg remnants mixed with ash were

scattered across the stove.

'Oh my God, the landlord is going to hate me!' I exclaimed.

Luckily our insurance covered the damage – we only had to pay a small excess fee.

And considering my

medical condition, my landlord was luckily very understanding about it all.

After telling my friends about Mia's heroic stunt, they couldn't believe it!

I'd received the astounding news before the fire that Mia had been nominated for an Animal Star Award for her extraordinary work as an assistance dog.

Now, it really resonated.

To think that without Mia acting so cleverly on instinct during the fire, my life would have been at risk like never before – it's just so surreal!

But I couldn't be more grateful to her – I even took her on a surprise trip to the beach – her happy place – to celebrate her act of bravery.

Sharing the story with our TikTok and Instagram followers, Mia was flooded with so many comments of praise and admiration.

Now, Mia has proved that she isn't just my sidekick – she's my hero, too.

● Follow @melody_and_mia_gsd on TikTok and search *mia the assistance dog in training* on Instagram and Facebook



Me and Mia snuggling up

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