



Sydney florist Stuart White says there is not as much love in the air on a weekend Valentine's Day.

Photo Rob Homer

Dud date a thorny subject

A Sunday Valentine's Day is a flop for those courting the trade of office romantics, writes **Sam McKeith**.

Business is not looking all that rosy for Stuart White this Valentine's Day. The Sydney florist says trade could end up around 20 per cent down this year just because the big day falls on a Sunday.

"A Sunday Valentine's Day is typically a dud for florists," he says.

"You don't get girls sending themselves flowers in the office to make the other girls jealous and CEOs won't be sending anonymous bunches of flowers to their personal assistants."

He is not the only one lamenting an unfortunate calendar date. Many florists, restaurateurs and chocolatiers across the country say a Sunday Valentine's has dented trade from office-bound romantics.

Even so, they say business is still up on last year when the downturn forced cash-strapped sweethearts to swap pricey

indulgences for bad poetry and home-made cards.

At Bookham, near Yass in regional NSW, rose grower Sus Bush says Valentine's Day has boosted business but not by as much as it would have had it fallen during the week.

Bush says the firm usually sells 8000 stems a week, but in the lead-up to Valentine's has sold around 20,000 – helped by ideal weather conditions.

"Regular customers have dropped back a bit because it's on a Sunday but not as much as we thought they would," she says.

She says it is also getting tougher for local growers to compete with imported flowers that flood the market around Valentine's Day.

Imported flowers come from countries including India, Colombia, Zimbabwe, Ecuador and China.

The co-owner of Forest Glen Roses, Mark Grubski, warns that many imported roses – for which consumers pay a premium at this time of year – have a short shelf life compared with domestic varieties.

Australian Quarantine and

Inspection Service requires overseas exporters to dip roses in herbicide to prevent the introduction of foreign diseases.

"An exporter has to dip it in Roundup so by the time it gets here it's dead – and anyone who buys roses will know by the next day they've wilted," Grubski says.

In Brisbane, Mayfield Chocolates Australia owner Peter Ingall says demand is slow from CBD office workers, but has nonetheless improved slightly from last year.

Mayfield says most customers are spending between \$10 and \$25 at his store, with the odd love-struck consumer shelling out up to \$100 on boxes of heart-shaped chocolates.

In Melbourne, there are only a few tables left at Crown Casino's restaurants as couples book for Valentine's Day and the Lunar New Year celebrations begin.

Public relations general manager Ann Peacock says demand has increased from 2009 and, combined with the Lunar New Year, the weekend is set to be "extremely busy".

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