



floret's field-to-vase movement

In this excerpt from her new how-to book, *Floret Farm's Cut Flower Garden* (Chronicle, 2017), Washington state flower farmer Erin Benzakein shares her thoughts about using locally grown blooms at the peak of season

Photography by **MICHÈLE M. WAITE**

THE UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY of this book is that using local blooms and other materials when they're in season, at their most abundant, will give you the most luscious, beautiful bouquets. Food lovers have eagerly embraced the practice of eating what's in season, and many of the world's most respected chefs base their menus on the freshest regional ingredients they can find, with the knowledge that produce flown in from thousands of miles away, at the wrong time of year, pales in comparison to perfectly ripe treasures picked nearby, at their peak.

Consumers are demanding to know how, where, and by whom their goods are produced. Flowers are



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-ERIN BENZAKEIN

no exception. On the heels of the local food movement, the field-to-vase movement is continuing its meteoric rise in popularity. High-end florists are now seeking locally grown blooms, and working to grow some of their own material to supplement what they source from wholesale outlets. Eco-conscious couples are choosing seasonal flowers for their wedding bouquets. Many young farmers are looking to flowers as a viable crop to cultivate. And home gardeners everywhere are itching to tuck a bed or two of flowers, just for cutting, into their existing landscapes.

Each season has its stars. Early spring welcomes fragrant narcissus, showy tulips, and many types of unique flowering bulbs. Late spring is filled with blooming branches, heady sweet peas, and big billowy peonies. As summer arrives, with it come garden roses, lilies, and all of the cheerful warm weather lovers such as zinnias, cosmos, and

Dahlias grow well in the Pacific Northwestern climate. Celosia comes in distinct shapes such as fans, plumes, and brains. OPPOSITE: Benzakein tends to rows of snapdragons, which are early summer bloomers in her garden. “They’re true cut-and-come-again flowers, meaning the more you pick them, the more they’ll flower,” she says.

dahlias. Autumn ushers in textural elements like grasses, grains, and pods that pair beautifully with sunflowers and showy chrysanthemums. In winter, the abundance continues indoors with pots of forced amaryllis and paperwhites, and evergreen garlands and wreaths. By looking to nature for cues, flower lovers can savor the best of the bounty by enjoying each bloom while it’s at its peak. The beauty of planning around the seasons is that it doesn’t matter where you live or what your climate is like. As soon as you learn the general timing of your last frost date in spring and your first frost date in autumn, you can grow an abundance of crops within those months, and possibly year round.

There is something magical about experiencing an entire year through flowers. Because my work requires me to have a close connection to the landscape, I find I’m much more present in the moment and connected to the seasonal shifts going on around me. Once you start growing your own cutting garden and working with seasonal flowers, you’ll likely notice a powerful transformation in your awareness as you tune in to the subtle, magical changes in nature. 🌸