

Source and Grow Your Own Organic Bouquets

- by Orin Martin

Not to start out on too negative a note, but the cut flower bouquets you find at many chain grocery stores are indeed pretty and pretty cheap, too. But in reality, those eye-catching flowers are expensive in that they are produced with many negative environmental and social consequences—

- Most retail/commercial flowers are produced “offshore” (a high percent in Central and South America).
- These production systems are chemical, water and energy intensive.
- The environmental laws in these offshore countries are often lax, and thus pesticides and fungicides now banned in the U.S. are featured; even the toxic and outdated DDT is still employed.
- These flowers are well traveled (1,500–3,000 mile footprint) and in the aggregate contribute to atmospheric as well as land and water pollution worldwide.
- As or more importantly, the working conditions in these controlled (often enclosed greenhouse) growing environments are toxic for workers—a high percentage of whom are women of child-bearing age, and some are in fact children themselves.
- Workers in many of these “offshore” flower operations also often endure low wages, long hours and abusive treatment.

“Root Down” with Real Field Flowers

What are some positive alternatives? You can go—

- Seasonal
- Local
- Organic/Sustainable

Just as there are “locavores” and “100-mile diets” how about the “50-mile bouquet” or better yet the “50-foot bouquet.” The first term involves buying your flowers at local farmers’ markets and other local sources (see page 6 for some recommended sources—most are Farm and Garden Apprenticeship Program graduates). Develop a personal relationship with your flower farmers as no doubt many of you have done with your vegetable and fruit growers. The second term entails growing your own.

While the first, last and deciding reason to grow cut flowers is for the sheer beauty of it, there are other compelling reasons to do so—

Even in the best of economic times, the cost of cut flowers lies somewhere between a luxury and prohibitive. You can grow your own for pennies per plant with annuals.

Just as vegetables are food for the body, think of flowers as food for the spirit and soul.



Organic flower grower Zoe Hitchner creates beautiful bouquets at local farmers’ markets.

Cut flowers in a farm or garden landscape also make biological sense. Showy flowers attract crop pollinators (often winged insects). The concept of using flowers to attract and provision for beneficial insects that in turn aid in controlling detrimental insects (aphids, mites, thrips, mealybugs, etc.) is now a well-documented sector of entomology. Terms like farmscaping, provision of resources to natural enemies, habitat management to enhance biological control of arthropod pests and the like speak to the confluence of age-old folk wisdom and research-based studies showing that fewer crop pests are found as the plant species diversity of an agroecological system increases.