

HOW DOES YOUR

Seed of Wisdom
“The best time to be
in the fields is early
morning, when the day is
still calm and the
flowers have yet to
unfurl.”

The Lam Family (from left: Joyce, Lyh-Ping, Daniel, Helen, Grace, Lyh-Rhen, and Lyh-Hsin) grow peonies and more in the Blackstone River Valley of Massachusetts. Turn the page to learn about their farm, Fivefork.



GARDEN GROW?

If it feels to you like everyone is suddenly a flower farmer, you're not alone.

But is it as rosy at it seems? Here, pro growers share the ups and downs of having Mother Nature as a business partner and offer essential advice for anyone considering cultivating blooms for pleasure or profit.

written by LEIGH CRANDALL, ARRICCA ELIN SANSONE, and SARAH ZLOTNICK

BOOKS FOR BUDDING FARMERS

Dig into these titles recommended by those in the know.



The Classic

English farmer Georgie Newbery's beloved guide includes essential advice on growing, displaying, and selling flowers.

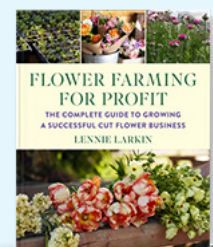
The Flower Farmer's Year \$40; amazon.com



The Primer

Lisa Mason Ziegler of educational website The Gardener's Workshop shares steps for creating and maintaining a cutting garden.

The Cut Flower Handbook \$30; bookshop.org



The Deep Dive

B-Side Farm's Lennie Larkin gets into the nitty-gritty details of building a profitable and efficient cut-flower business.

Flower Farming for Profit \$45; bookshop.org



Seed of Wisdom

"With both a straight and serrated edge, a Japanese Hori Hori knife makes transplanting and weeding super-easy."



Grace Lam & Co. The All-In Family

Fivefork Farms, Upton, Massachusetts

Grace Lam's life with flowers began early (though not tenderly) in her mother's Massachusetts garden. "I remember breaking her dahlias while kicking balls around the yard, then taping up the plants in hopes of her not noticing," she says.

Still, when Grace left a job on Wall Street in 2012, it was flowers and family that inspired a return to her roots. Soon after, Grace, along with mom Helen, dad Daniel, and siblings Lyh-Ping, Lyh-Rhen, Lyh-Hsin, and Joyce, purchased 38 acres that would become Fivefork Farms (fiveforkfarms.com).

The property, which draws its name from the five kids, is now one of the Boston area's most esteemed growers of sustainable

blooms. They each play a role: Grace and Lyh-Hsin run day-to-day operations, Joyce oversees finances, Lyh-Rhen works on branding and marketing, and Lyh-Ping takes point on networking and finding new business partners. Daniel ("He's everyone's favorite," says Grace) makes deliveries and directs traffic on market days.

The all-together-now mindset has helped Fivefork weather the changing Northeastern climate and grow a robust flower subscription service connecting customers to blooms that aren't often available in grocery stores (think butterfly ranunculus and parrot tulips). "Our biggest fights are about the farm," Grace says of working with family. "But at the end of the day, everyone just wants what's best for it."

Dee Hall The Community Builder

*Mermaid City Flowers,
Norfolk, Virginia*

Like many businesses, Dee Hall's began by spotting a hole in the market. "I wanted locally sourced flowers for my wedding and couldn't find any," she says. A lifelong gardening enthusiast (her grandmother grew flowers on St. Lucia, and Dee was raised across the street from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden in New York City), she planted her own scabiosa and dahlias in the front yard of her Norfolk, Virginia, home. "My neighborhood is really friendly, and soon the person across the street offered me growing space," she says. More offers followed and, in 2020, Dee launched Mermaid City Flowers (mermaidcityflowers.com), which now includes four sustainable gardens totaling an acre around the neighborhood. In addition to growing blooms for her bouquet subscription service, Dee cultivates native plants and pollinator-friendly flowers.

Dee is also busy sowing the seeds of community. In 2021, she formed the Tidewater Flower Collective to pool regional growers' resources and also founded Black Flower Farmers, a group that includes members around the world. "When we work together and support each other, everyone grows," she says.

Seed of Wisdom

"Find your people and ask for help. Flower farmers are a supportive bunch and we want each other to do well."



How to...Arrange a Farm-Fresh Bouquet

"Start by holding the larger focal flowers, then weave in wispiest stems," says June Mena of Ceres Botanical (ceresbotanical.com) in Richmond. "Keep a loose grip and adjust heights and angles as you go, rotating 45 degrees after each addition. When you like the design, retrim the stem bottoms evenly and secure together. Wrap flowers in a kraft paper rectangle, folded in half a bit off-kilter. Tie with ribbon or twine."

Seed of Wisdom

"Don't be afraid to cut plants way back. Pruning spurs new growth and keeps plants healthy and productive over time."



Peter Elmore **The Next Generation Grower**

*Star Bright Farm,
White Hall, Maryland*

Peter Elmore was just two years old when he and his father, Mark, took an evening walk in the hills of the 19th-century Maryland farm their family had just purchased. As they gazed upward and recited a familiar nursery rhyme, inspiration struck: Their home's new name would be "Star Bright."

Thirty years later, Peter is still inspiring the future of Star Bright Farm (starbright-farm.com), now as head farmer. After studying regenerative agriculture at the University of Vermont, he returned home in 2017 to implement what he'd learned. "Perennial plants are a cornerstone, as they're less disruptive to the environment," he says. To that end, the farm features an acre of lavender fields, complemented by five acres of perennial herbs and flowers. "We also have fruit trees and bushes, which add another level to the landscape."

Star Bright's business has also added layers. There's now The Barn Market, run by Peter's mother, Helen, where organic products made from the farm's herbs are sold and workshops and events are held. "We're building a diverse and resilient farm," says Peter. "One that will build upon itself for years to come."



How to... Put Your Petals to the Metal

The 1960s-era Volkswagen Transporter is the go-to vehicle for portable petals, thanks to ample storage space and a drop-gate flatbed perfect for displays. "It's truly a business in a box," says Mattie Bush of Amelia's Flowers (ameliasflowertruck.com), who parks three trucks around Nashville.

Source yours from Craigslist or auction sites, "then find a good mechanic and get AAA," Mattie says. Vintage charm comes with quirks!

STARTER PACKS

These seed companies offer high-quality heirloom varieties with pretty packaging to boot.



Botanical Interests

Illustrated seed packets offer detailed tips for growing success.

botanicalinterests.com



Seed Savers Exchange

This nonprofit safeguards and shares heirloom seeds.

seedsavers.org



Renee's Garden

Packets include a quick-view planting chart and harvesting info.

reneesgarden.com



Seed Needs

Choose from more than 280 flower varieties (some packets can also be customized).

seedneeds.com



Seed of Wisdom

"Cut dahlias in the morning or evening, when temperatures are lower. Cutting in higher heat shortens vase life."



Deanna Kitchen The Altruist

Twig & Vine Flower Farm, Conway, Washington

In 2017, Deanna Kitchen was looking to foster intergenerational connections for both herself and her three young sons in their Skagit Valley community. So she loaded a few buckets of homegrown dahlias into a Radio Flyer "with a broken handle and a really squeaky wheel," and she and the boys headed to a nearby long-term care facility to hand out blooms to residents. The gesture brought joy to its recipients, and sparked an "aha" moment for Deanna. "We could only go so far with our little red wagon," she thought. "But what if we invited others to join us?"

The idea sparked the Growing Kindness Project (growingkindnessproject.org), the nonprofit she formed in 2020. Through the

organization, Deanna provides more than 3,600 gardeners with educational resources, online forums, and dahlia tubers pulled from her own soil (and also donated by other flower farmers). Participants all have the same mission: to encourage connection and kindness by sharing free, freshly cut blooms with those who could use a little extra beauty in their lives.

While her own flower farm, Twig & Vine (twigandvinefarm.com), has admittedly taken a back seat to growing the movement—the farm now primarily functions as a home for in-person Growing Kindness workshops—Deanna remains as energized as ever by the cause. "Flowers are food for the soul," she says. "They're not a necessity, and that's what makes them special."

MORE BLOOM FOR YOUR BUCK

From spring staples to fall's finest, these easy-care flowers also have long vase lives.



Cosmos

Bring a graceful addition to arrangements with these delicate petals and wispy foliage.



Daffodils

Spring's cheerful, reliable herald also attracts pollinators.



Celosia

Blooming in June, the bright, feathery plumes add instant interest to gardens.



Zinnias

Hardy and fast-growing, they come in a dizzying array of shapes, sizes, and hues.



Dahlias

Romantic, textural, and a fall wedding favorite, forms range from tiny balls to plate-size.



Seed of Wisdom
"Sometimes the middle of the growing process—watering, weeding—will feel like a bit of a slog, but the harvest is so worth it."



Melanie Harrington

The Four-Seasons Farmer

Dahlia May Flower Farm, Trenton, Ontario

Eleven years ago, Melanie Harrington was unloading yet another box of carnations shipped from South America at the flower shop where she worked when inspiration struck. "I wanted to start my own business and I wanted to grow something locally," she says.

She began by planting zinnias on the same Ontario farm she'd been raised. "My parents grew vegetables and a few flowers," says Melanie. "I loved going to the farmstand with my dad when I was a kid, standing on a milk crate and arranging flowers in tins on our pickup tailgate." In 2014, she began Dahlia May (dahliamayflowerfarm.com), and the following winter she studied flower farming.

"My idea was to supply Ontario-grown flowers 12 months of the year," she says. The farm now features four acres of mixed blooms and a greenhouse where the seasons yield stems like tulips, daffodils, peonies, strawflower, and, of course, dahlias. There are also nine acres of sunflowers, which Melanie cultivates for the seeds.

Flowers are sold at the farmstand seven days a week, where visitors can browse single stems and ready-made bouquets. Dahlia May also offers a flower subscription and floral design services. "I'm happy I've been able to continue what my parents started," says Melanie. "It's long hours, but when I'm watching the sunset over the flower harvest, the work feels rewarding."

Alyssa Ward The Multi-Hyphenate

Ward's Farm, Salem, New Jersey

It was dinnerplate dahlias that first hooked Alyssa Ward on flowers. She spotted them during a visit to Pennsylvania's Longwood Gardens. "I fell in love," she says. "I went right home and [my husband] planted some."

She and her husband, Allen, were already growing vegetables for their roadside stand, but they soon noticed it was the blooms customers gravitated toward. So, in 2018 when they moved to a new home with more than 11 acres in Salem, New Jersey, they reestablished Ward's Farm (wardsfarmnj.com) with a focus on organic cut flowers, despite both juggling 9-to-5 gigs, too. "Farming is way more than a side hustle, but we find the time," says Alyssa. "Plus, the learnings we have from our jobs in areas like customer service help our business."

They opened the farm for pick-your-own visits and, buoyed by their popularity, dreamed up more reasons for shoppers to come, from photo shoots to BYOB date nights to picnic days. They evolve what they grow, planting new blooms as demand changes. Flexibility is key, and so is taking time to soak in successes. Says Alyssa: "We love seeing our guests appreciate the hard work we do."



Seed of Wisdom

"Hay is a great insulator for tender perennials, and, since it contains nutrients, it acts as a fertilizer, too."

How to...Grow Your Own Cutting Garden

Carmen Johnston, owner of Bespoke Garden Plans (bespokegardenplans.com), shares how to get growing in your own back yard. Download her DIY design plan for a colorful perennial cutting garden, exclusive to *Country Living* readers, at countryliving.com/garden-plan.

PICK A BRIGHT SPOT.

Most perennials require direct sun for six to eight hours per day. If you don't have sufficient sun, opt for shade-loving plants instead.

SCALE TO SIZE.

Pare the plan to fit your space. No yard? No matter! Use 24-inch-diameter containers, then pick three or four plants to include.

MIX UP HEIGHTS.

Varied stems make a garden look full. Place tall plants in the back or middle, and stair-step shorter heights to the bed's edges.

PLANT TO YOUR TASTE.

Carmen's plan includes restful shades of pink, lavender, and white, but if hot, spicy hues are your style, do that! Grow what you love.

ADD SEATING.

Include some wicker chairs or a garden bench so you can sit and gaze. "You always need to enjoy your bounty," says Carmen.