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The **Cut Flower**

Q U A R T E R L Y

Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers Inc.

for growers of field and specialty greenhouse cuts

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From the **PRESIDENT**

Vicki Stamback

I was talking with MaryLee Johnson not long ago and she told me in my last report I should have also mentioned *The Wall Street Journal* as another great information source. She was absolutely correct and I wanted to pass that along. Thank you, MaryLee!

I have had more time than usual to read this winter and spring. It looks like the cold, wet spring will continue for a while. We can usually count on an 80-degree day or two in February, but not this year. It has been the first time that all of my tulips haven't opened up in a three- or four-day span, and all the freesia hasn't blasted open all at once. There is *something* good in anything. This brings me to a book I am currently reading. My dad bought a dozen of these books and handed them out to anyone who would take one. I always take him up on any of his offers because we think alike. My dad has given me tons of great business, as well as life, advice, so when he talks, I listen. This particular book of the month is *Happy for No Reason* by Marci Shimoff.

I can honestly say that I am truly happy 95% of the time. It is the other 5% that bugs me sometimes. I think the majority of people have 'that percentage', whatever it may be, which keeps us from being truly happy 100% of the time, no matter what the circumstances may be.

Aristotle wrote "Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence".

Is it really possible to be happy 100% of the time? Shimoff says yes. She studied 100 people, who had extraordinary events happen in their lives, yet they remain extremely happy everyday. She found they all followed three basic principles:

1. What expands makes you happier. (The Law of Expansion)
2. The Universe is out to support you. (The Law of Universal Support)
3. What you appreciate, appreciates. (the Law of Attraction)

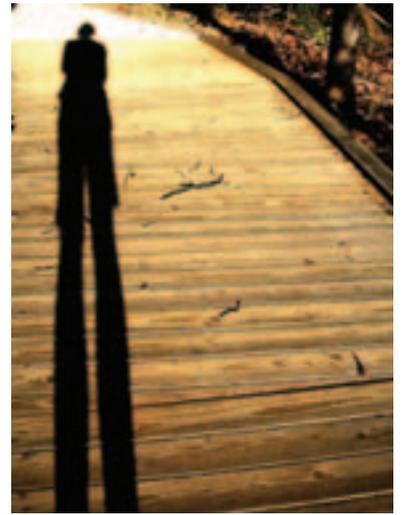
For more explanation of these laws, you need to read the book. They are simple yet so important. Shimoff also lists a 7-step approach to being happy with similarities to building a house.

1. The Foundation—take ownership of your happiness.
2. The Pillar of the Mind—don't believe everything you think.
3. The Pillar of the Heart—let love lead.
4. The Pillar of the Body—make your cells happy.
5. The Pillar of the Soul—plug yourself into spirit.
6. The Roof—live a life inspired by purpose.
7. The Garden—cultivate nourishing relationships.

One reason I'm enjoying this book so much is that it reminds me of ASCFG members. Most are truly happy. Most are inspired by purpose, are certainly cultivating nourishing relationships, and strive to keep that garden growing. It's easy to get caught up in the negative things that happen around us every day, and it takes time and breaking of old habits to truly be happy for no reason. But if any group has the power to be happy and to spread that happiness, it's the ASCFG.

As you get wrapped up in the business of the growing season, remember what Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "Most of the shadows of this life are caused by standing in one's own sunshine."

I wish a great season for everyone, with plenty of sunshine!



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Are Internships Right for Your Farm?

Christof Bernau

Lately there has been quite a lot of discussion on the ASCFG Bulletin Board on the subject of on-farm internships. Based on discussions at recent ASCFG Board meetings and following the written threads, I thought I might take this opportunity to summarize some of the thoughts expressed by members, highlight legal issues growers should be aware of, and detail some of the resources available so that people wishing to host interns can do so in a legal and mutually beneficial manner.

With the average age of farmers in the United States hovering in the mid fifties and with so many financial and technical barriers to becoming a new farmer, there is certainly a need to help grow the next generation of farmers by providing real world experience and training opportunities. However, is this right for you and for your farm operation? Are you

able to make the commitment to training and education that is inherent to hosting interns? Some growers have expressed the very valid concern that reliance on cheap intern labor creates an unfair market advantage, and penalizes growers who pay fair wages for all of their labor. While there is certainly a lot of truth in this assertion, especially in the more egregious arrangements, growers who take on interns typically sacrifice some level of production efficiency via their time commitment to education and the short-term personnel turnover that necessitates constant recruitment and retraining.

Education and Evaluation

The commitment to education is a first level requirement for on-farm internships, along with a willingness to involve interns in all aspects of production. Commonly, growers also provide at least partial room and board, or at a minimum, help in finding housing. In many cases the mentor grower will also provide some level of feedback and evaluation to the mentee.



Unfortunately, federal labor laws, designed to protect employees from unscrupulous employers, do not provide a precise definition of internships, nor do they attribute tangible value to the learning process that interns typically seek. What is clear is that federal labor laws require that all employees be paid minimum wage for all hours worked. Distinguishing interns from employees can be a difficult issue and may require specific legal counsel.

To meet the legal definition of an intern and thus be partially exempt from federal wage and overtime requirements, internships must satisfy the following six conditions: 1) training should be similar to that provided by vocational schools, 2) training should primarily be for the benefit of the trainee, 3) the presence of trainees should not displace other

paid workers performing the same tasks, 4) employers should derive no immediate advantage from the presence of interns, in fact interns may actually impede production efficiency, 5) trainees are not necessarily entitled to employment at the end of the internship period, and 6) employer and trainees understand in advance that trainees will not receive wages for all of their work. See the website: <http://definitions.uslegal.com/i/internship/> for a more complete explanation of these six qualifiers.

The only way to be in complete legal compliance is to pay your interns for all of their labor.

Anything that you would normally pay an employee to accomplish, you must also pay interns to do. The grower has the legal right not to pay interns for time explicitly spent in education and training, but that is all. I encourage all employers and potential mentors to look closely at the U.S. Department of Labor fact sheet on Labor Laws: <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs12.htm>. This document contains a wealth of critical information about the labor laws designed to protect

employees and provides good guidance on compliance so that you never find yourself the subject of a labor board complaint.

In January, there was a good, if not a bit discouraging session on this topic at the Ecofarm Conference in Asilomar. Follow this link <http://www.eco-farm.org/programs/efc/> and then click on the “Download Ecofarm CD and MP3 order form” and go to Session D where you will find a session called “Are Internships Illegal?” Folks may be interested in purchasing this CD. It contains lots of valuable insights and there were some good handouts available providing practical, though not necessarily legal, advice for growers wishing to have internships.

Get it in Writing

Establishing clear expectations, in writing, of what your mentor and mentee relationship will look like is critical. How many hours per week and when will interns be expected to work.? Delineate starting and ending dates that clarify the temporary/seasonal duration of the arrangement. Clearly state what is the rate of pay, and whether or not room and board are included or if there is an additional cost to the intern for these provisions. Always check with federal, state and local laws concerning labor standards, room and board allowances, overtime compensation and your obligations regarding payroll taxes, workers’ compensation coverage and unemployment insurance coverage. While compliance may seem costly and cumbersome, the fines associated with non-compliance are far more burdensome.

Growers considering hosting internships might want to look how others have set up their relationships with interns. A great place to start would be the CRAFT program at <http://www.craftfarmapprentice.com> The Cooperative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training is a network of New England farms that work together to provide a more comprehensive learning experience that could easily be achieved

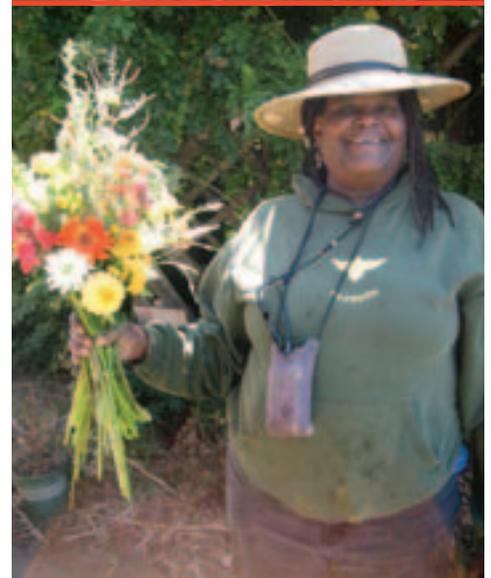
on any one farm. A similar program exists in Oregon through the Rogue Valley Farm Corps: <http://www.roguefarmcorps.org/Home>. A quick look at the descriptions of participating farms will give you a sense of the gamut of ways in which internships are organized, some completely legal, others perhaps not so.

Bob Wollam, ASCFG luminary, has a detailed and clearly articulated internship arrangement laid out on his website: <http://www.wollamgardens.com/Internships.html>. This is another great example to peruse when developing your internship agreement.

Finally, I would like to point you in the direction of three useful books. First, Richard Wiswall’s *The Organic Farmer’s Business Handbook* provides valuable tools for growers to accurately assess their labor and production costs. Two other titles, both available through the New England Small Farm Institute, are excellent resources for growers considering incorporating internships into their farming operations. *The On Farm Mentor’s Guide* provides excellent references on the subjects of teaching, training, housing arrangements, OSHA compliance and the recruitment and selection of interns. *Cultivating a New Crop of Farmers* clearly defines the nature of mentoring, and provides tools to assess the compatibility of oneself and farm as an internship site.

So many young growers have gotten the start from internships, finding incredible inspiration and invaluable experience while working under the guidance of more experienced mentors. As long as you treat interns as wage employees, potential legal challenges can be minimized and you too can play a vital part in cultivating the next generation of flower, fruit and vegetable farmers.

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SMALL Things Considered

Gay Smith

Is Value Overrated?

Has “value” eclipsed “green” as the one-word description of what drives consumer purchasing in 2010? Hard to say. Both continue to be trend drivers, but to learn more about this year’s trends, I checked out a site called Trends Spotting at <http://tiny.cc/lat5J>

There I found 2010’s trends, influences and predictions, written in 140 characters by “experts” . They listed differentiation, branding and value as reoccurring themes, but other themes popped up, too:

- *Value is a top priority.*
- *The message must include differentiation beyond pricing.*
- *Product assortment is a point of differentiation.*
- *Not made in China—“buy local” is part of the “circle the wagons” movement.*
- *Coupon activity increases.*
- *Consumers will purchase more expensive product if they are convinced of the products’ value.*
- *Sustainability, in every possible meaning of the word, is the only way forward.*
- *Direct to consumer options thrive.*

These predictions dovetail nicely with many ASCFG practices; recent BB threads on eco-respectful packaging is a good example. The many ways growers entwine trend predictions with their own *modus operandi* doesn’t stop at crop differentiation. Buy local, sell direct to consumers and be cognizant of framing every action, from crop handling to selling flowers at a profit level, with sustainability in mind.



Long gone are the days when it was enough for growers to simply grow. The business model today necessitates growers be marketers, too. What trend ideas can you incorporate into business this year? How about the consumer craze for coupons? As the experts duly noted, coupon activity is predicted to increase. How can you use coupons to your advantage? If you’re selling directly to the public at farmers’ markets, use coupons or a frequent buyer card to entice customers to repeatedly seek out your product. It also is one more vehicle to get your name in front of them on something that will not be immediately discarded.

What actions are you planning to use to build or improve brand awareness? First law of branding: get your company name on everything from sleeves to price signs and email signatures to clothing and delivery vans. If you’re selling directly to retail florists, make sure they have a fridge magnet or laminated card that includes your company name, logo, email address and telephone number. With smart phone technology, your name must be easily accessible, not dug out or looked up.

What about your logo? Keep in mind that a logo is a symbol that provides

consumers with instant, and powerful, brand recognition. Effective logos stick in your head—names not so much—so fall in love with a logo that sticks. When you ask friends and family for their opinions, be sure to include a variety of ages in your survey.

Is a cool logo trend-smart? Yes, because it recognizes this 2010 prediction: *Visual fluency—the ongoing shift from words to images—will accelerate.* Transparency and authenticity are important, too. Customers like the back story. It’s the details that make your product different from the cookie cutter bouquets they get at their supermarket. Make sure signage is not only legible but creative too—a little edginess grabs attention.

Diversify or Perish

Ha! ASCFG members are ahead of the curve by a lap or two in this category. Heck, you have to produce something better and different than what the flower factories in Colombia and Ecuador are churning out. On the ASCFG Bulletin Board, Joe Schmitt recently commented on retail responses to *Persicaria*, a crop that some ASCFG members are growing.

He wrote "It caught the attention of some, was ignored by others. That's often the case with new introductions. Seems some new items need to be around a while to catch on. I think sometimes we suffer from the super-mega-mart problem of too many choices. That and the need for customers to develop a history of vaseworthiness (if I may coin a word here)."

Fantastic word, Joel! "Vaseworthiness" satisfies two more trend predictions: *Winning brands will innovate and differentiate*, and *Product assortment is a point of differentiation*. We flower chemical companies are looking to win sales by respecting the same predictions. Growers would never choose a flower variety solely by comparing seed price, but postharvest treatments are often chosen simply on price. What's the cheapest bucket of powder offered? In fact, different formulas give different results and the direction in flower solutions is a focus on treating the weakest point affecting overall performance. The idea, of course, is that improved vase performance ramps up the value of any cut flower. For example, hydration formulas having a synergy of flow boosters. Bulb formulas that rebalance cell chemistry to prevent premature yellow foliage and short vase life, all variables evaluated in the process of deeming a flower/grass/filler/foliage vaseworthy.

Friend Me!

Social networking getting you down? It is me. I feel perpetually guilty at the grimace that crosses my face when I get an invite from LinkedIn or Facebook. But I had new eyes after reading the March/February copy of *Canadian Florist*. Publisher Sue Fredericks wrote of how she's shifting her view from a social networking skeptic to a believer. Citing a real life example in which a Twitter blog turned around a dismal business situation, changing the customer mix in the process, gave Sue (and me!) a new way of looking at it. Since marketing and branding involves telling your story, why not utilize social media as a tool to

tell/sell your story? Another way to tip the scale toward your success is by recognizing the 2010 prediction: *We are all media, the influence of one*.

As the new season opens and sales starting revving up, tweak your marketing efforts with trend predictions in mind. Your flowers are hip, why shouldn't your marketing efforts follow advice of experts who decide what trends will persuade customers to buy? The conversation

doesn't end with differentiation, visual communication or value as purchase drivers. The best prediction is last: *(F)luxury: luxury will be whatever consumers want it to be over the next 12 months. Flowers are (f)luxurious!*

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IPM Update

Stanton Gill

Aphids - Early Pests of the Season

Wow, what a winter! Here in Maryland we had record-breaking snowfall with over 76 inches from two storms. The East Coast has experienced one of the coldest Februaries in over 50 years. If you're a cut flower grower using a greenhouse to start cut flower transplants, this past winter you spent a lot of time knocking off snow off it, spent lots of money to heat it, and tried real hard to melt the remaining snow so the weight did not collapse the structure. Some desperate growers cut the plastic on their greenhouses to prevent snow load damage and just went without greenhouse covering for February. The worst part of these big storms was that after the snow hit the East Coast it hung around for a very long time, melting ever so slowly. Most people were glad to see February end, move into spring, and get plants going for the 2010 season.

If you're using a greenhouse to get an early jump on the season, better get your rear in gear and set up a regular monitoring program so insects and disease don't eat into your profits. Greenhouse and high tunnels are great and really empower a cut flower grower, but with great power comes great responsibility (quote from "Spider-Man 2", I think). Bugs love greenhouse plants as much as you love to grow plants. You don't need to live in fear of insects consuming your plants if you conduct regular monitoring and combine this with good sanitation practices.

Good (Green)house Keeping

Ideally, you have completely cleaned out the greenhouse, removing all old carryover plants, pet plants, and weeds. It is an excellent sanitation practice to sweep debris or shop-vac plant litter. If you have a spun-down polypropylene weed barrier on the greenhouse floor then a power washer can be used to clean the floor. Most males like to power wash things since it involves equipment that sprays a lot of high-pressure water.

Afterwards use a hand sprayer to apply a disinfectant such as a quaternary salt (Greenshield) or Clorox (1 part Clorox to 10 parts water) to



Aphids on gerbera foliage.

benches and growing areas. Notice I said "Clorox". This is because Clorox is the only sodium hypochlorite that has an EPA label as a disinfectant for use in greenhouses. Store brands do not have this EPA labeling.

Do not leave any weeds on the greenhouse floor because these will serve as reservoirs for insects and mites that will easily migrate onto your cut flower transplants. This is where you get your spring exercise, bending over to pull weeds. You can use glyphosate to kill the weeds if the greenhouse is completely empty and you have the vents closed. Hand weeding is usually not too much work unless you let weeds get out of hand during the fall/winter. Besides, everyone likes skinny, good-looking cut flower growers. If you don't want to be slim and attractive, there are chemical weed options which include use of Diquat (Reward), or short-chained fatty acids (Scythe). Reward and Scythe just burn back the tops of the weeds and are not as systemic as glyphosate.

First Bugs of the Season

One of the first pest samples we usually receive from cut flower growers in the spring is aphids. Many species of aphids are lurking out there, but it is usually one of the "group of four" that we see at the lab. This very trendy and popular group includes green peach aphid, melon aphid, potato aphid and foxglove aphid. These four species can reproduce rapidly in a greenhouse, causing you much frustration and anxiety. The key is detecting them early, and taking action as soon as you find them. In most cases, aphid populations build up as little epicenters in your greenhouse. Find these epicenters and deal with them quickly before they get a chance to spread.

Aphid populations can virtually explode in greenhouses. When greenhouses become packed with tight spacing of plants, as is often the case in spring, populations of aphids can build and spread rapidly. While a grower concentrates on producing plants and preparing fields, aphid buildup may go unnoticed until the situation is out of control.

In greenhouses, most aphid species are able to reproduce asexually (parthenogenesis), with females giving birth to approximately 100 live female offspring (viviparous). This high reproductive capacity and short development time means that more frequent applications of insecticides may be required, thus increasing the probability of aphid populations developing resistance.

Certain species of plants are highly susceptible to aphids and should be checked frequently in spring. Plants that are big draws for aphids include sage (just about any sage is a magnet for aphids), dianthus, coleus, basil, snapdragons, zinnias, and any of the ornamental peppers grown for cut stems.

Monitoring is Key

Early detection is critical to prevent an aphid population from spreading throughout the greenhouse. When using biological control organisms, it is important that the release of natural enemies be initiated early in the cropping cycle. What is just as important is which plants tend to be susceptible to aphids so that potential problems can be avoided when a crop is moved into a greenhouse.

During the feeding process, aphids extract between 11% and 12% protein, and large quantities of water and sugar from plants. The water and sugar initially ingested is excreted from the aphid's anal opening. This excrement, which covers leaves, is a sweet, sticky substance called honeydew. Honeydew is an excellent growing medium for black sooty mold fungi, which can cover foliage and flowers. Look for shiny foliage in the greenhouse since it is something that you can easily see (even if your eyes just are not what they used to be when you were a novice in the cut flower business).

The Cut Flower Quarterly

Aphids shed their old skin (cuticle) as they progress through development. This process is called molting. The old (cast) skins, which may be present on leaves, appear white.

Aphids differ in their distribution on plants and dispersal capability, which can influence monitoring procedures. The melon aphid tends to be located in the plant interior, aggregated on the stems and flower buds, whereas the green peach aphid tends to be less concentrated, but typically located on the terminal growth of plants. They may blend in with the foliage due to their light green color. Green peach aphid is also more mobile than melon aphid, often dispersing to adjacent plants. The potato aphid congregates in large numbers on plants, and the distinct strip extending down the middle of body is noticeable.

All cut flower growers should invest in a good 10-20 X hand lens, and use it to examine foliage and stems closely for presence of aphids.

When populations of aphids build up to very high levels on plants, female aphids will start to birth out aphids with wing buds. Fully formed wings on adult aphids can be twice the length of the body of the insect. The winged forms can disperse in your greenhouse, spreading the populations to new plants. If you reach this stage it can be a tense time in your growing areas, and you better take action quickly or things will get out of control rapidly.

Yellow sticky cards will capture winged aphids. Although yellow sticky cards may indicate the presence of winged forms of aphids, it is still important to inspect plant foliage at least weekly to detect aphid populations early enough, so that the appropriate controls may be implemented.

Control Options

Aphidius colemani is a parasitoid we have used with success in Maryland growers' greenhouses. It attacks green peach aphid, but it is more successful parasitizing melon aphid (*Aphis gossypii*). Females of both species lay eggs into aphids; the eggs hatch into larvae that consume the internal contents of their

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host. As the parasitoid larvae mature, the aphid body expands and turns brown to tan. The emerging adult parasitoid creates a round exit hole in the dorsal (top) side of the aphid's abdomen. Emerging adults will mate and then females of the next generation will search out and parasitize any aphids that are present.

Aphidoletes aphidimyza is a predatory midge that attacks over 50 species of aphids including melon aphid, green peach aphid, and potato aphid. The larvae stage feeds on aphids whereas the adults do not feed. Adults feed on honeydew produced by aphids. Adult females locate aphids using visual cues and olfaction (odors), and then lay eggs adjacent to aphid colonies. A single larva consumes 10 to 25 aphids during its life.

Several insecticides have come onto the market in the last ten years which provide good levels of aphid control. The newer products tend to be safer materials that are used at very low rates. The somewhat bad news is that these new products cost a lot more than some of the older pesticides that have been around longer.

Some of the materials we have tested at the University of Maryland Extension with good success in aphid control include Aria (flonicamid) and Endeavor (pymetrozine). Both block the stylet of the aphid, resulting in starvation of the insect. In our trials it took 5 -10 days before you really see the impact of the application but it is very effective for aphid control. It's difficult for insects to develop resistance to a material that does something physical like blocking the stylet. Another new material we trialed in 2009 is Kontos (spirotetramat). A systemic insecticide, Kontos was very effective controlling green peach and melon aphid for 20 -30 days. It is also good on spider mites.

To help determine insecticide efficacy, several aphid-infested plants can be marked with flags or flagging tape, and an estimate of the aphid number on each may be recorded. Several days after an insecticide application, the number of live aphids may be recorded. It is important to examine plants carefully and frequently to determine whether additional applications are required.



Cast skins from aphids and
sooty mold on celosia.

New Publication

This winter, Karen Rane (pathologist), Andrew Ristvey (horticulturist), Joyce Latimer (horticulturist) and myself (Stanton) have collaborated on a new extension publication for greenhouse production. We hope "Total Plant Management for Greenhouse and Cut Flower Management - with Emphasis on IPM and Nutrient and Water Management" will be in print and online later this spring.

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RESEARCH Update

Megan Bame

Funding for this column is provided by the ASCFG Research Committee

A Non-volatile 1-MCP Alternative

Ethylene has a detrimental effect on the vase life of many cut flowers. It can result in undesirable abscission, senescence, physiological disorders, loss of cell turgor and pigment degradation. In the early 1990s, 1-methylcyclopropene (1-MCP) was shown to be an effective and environmentally safe ethylene blocker. The volatile character of 1-MCP limits its application to enclosed areas. Research is ongoing to evaluate 1-MCP alternatives that can be used in outdoor or open space. One promising compound is N,N-dipropyl(1-cyclopropenylmethyl) amine, or DPCA. This research evaluated the effect of DPCA on four ornamental crops: rose, carnation, geranium and orchid.

Each plant species was tested using three treatments. A preliminary experiment indicated that DPCA was more effective as a spray than as a vase water additive, so spray application was the method of choice. DPCA was sprayed to run off using five different rates: 0.4, 2, 4, 20 and 40 nmol. In the 1-MCP treatment, plants were placed in a gas-tight cabinet and exposed to 0.2 $\mu\text{L L}^{-1}$ 1-MCP for 6 hours. For the control, plant material was placed in tap water. Evaluation of postharvest performance was based on recording visual senescence symptoms.

Both DPCA and 1-MCP significantly increased the number of days to reach each stage of floret senescence in each species tested. DPCA enhanced vase life of florets in all four species, reduced ethylene production in carnation flowers and prevented chlorophyll degradation in geranium leaves. Effective concentrations of DPCA varied among the plant species tested. The researchers hypothesize that this indicates differences in penetration ability of different plant tissue (petals vs.

leaves). As is the case for 1-MCP, species-specific ethylene sensitivity may also affect optimal application concentration.

While more research is needed, the potential for this new compound, DPCA, as an alternative for 1-MCP would allow easier, faster, open-air field treatment with no need for an air-tight environment.

Seglie, L, E.C. Sisler, H. Mibus, M. Serek, 2010. "Use of a non-volatile 1-MCP formulation, N,N-dipropyl(1-cyclopropenylmethyl) amine, for improvement of postharvest quality of ornamental crops." Postharvest Biology and Technology. 56, pp. 117-122.

Postharvest Treatment Improves Opening and Vase Life of Iris Flowers

The failure of iris flowers to open fully after dry transport and storage can be a major postharvest problem. Incomplete opening is a result of insufficient growth of the tissues that force the bud free of the constraining sheath leaves. This research, conducted at the University of California, Davis, tested a pulse treatment with the non-metabolizable Thidiazuron (TDZ), evaluating the opening and longevity of cut iris flowers.

Iris x hollandica 'Discovery' flowers were harvested at commercial maturity with 0.5 cm of the tepal tips emerged from the sheath leaves. To assess TDZ concentrations, stems were pulse treated for 24 hours at TDZ rates of 0, 0.1, 0.2, 0.5 or 1 mM in deionized water. To assess TDZ treatment time, stems were placed

in a solution of 0.5 mM TDZ for 0, 1, 3, 6, 12 and 24 hours. Additional treatment evaluations included flower development stage, TDZ efficacy when combined with other postharvest treatments (i.e., GA₃ and sucrose) and TDZ effects on flower respiration and ethylene production.

A pulse treatment of 0.2 to 1 mM TDZ for 6 to 24 hours at 0°C or 20°C was shown to provide a simple and practical postharvest treatment for iris flowers to extend longevity and prevent leaf yellowing. However the research found a different TDZ concentration threshold for inhibition of leaf and floral senescence. This indicates the need for more research of TDZ concentrations on other flower species.

Other treatments suggests 20 percent sucrose in the TDZ plus GA₃ pulse solution further extended flower life (6.4 days) and opening, particularly after dry storage. The efficacy of this treatment, even after 14 days of dry storage may provide additional marketing opportunities for shipment or special holidays, such as Mother's Day.

Furthermore, TDZ pulsing increased the number of 'Discovery' iris stems that developed a second open flower as the first flower was beginning to senesce. This further increased the display life of the stems.

Macnish, A.J., C. Jiang, M.S. Reid, 2010. "Treatment with thidiazuron improves opening and vase life of iris flowers." Postharvest Biology and Technology. 56, pp. 77-84.

UV-C Irradiation for Postharvest Treatment of Freesia

Low doses of ultraviolet light (UV) have been shown to reduce storage rots in fruits and vegetables. This is thought to be due to a germicidal effect of the UV-C on the pathogen and/or an induced defense response by the host. Since *Botrytis cinerea* infection is a concern among Freesia cut flower growers, particularly when shipping, this study evaluated the effect of UV-C irradiation on cut Freesia blooms. In addition to observing the specking caused by *B. cinerea*, postharvest quality was also assessed.

Inflorescences of *Freesia x hybrid* var 'Cote d' Azur' were harvested at full maturity with all buds still closed. They were irradiated 24 hours after harvest at five UV-C doses: 0, 0.5, 1, 2.5 and 5 kJ m⁻².

Exposure times ranged from 0 to 13 minutes. Samples were artificially inoculated with *B. cinerea* either before or after the UV-C exposure. Evaluation of disease control was measured using a disease severity score, a count of lesion number and a measure of lesion diameter. Postharvest quality was assessed using vase life, fresh weights and wilt scores. The inflorescences that were irradiated after inoculation displayed significant disease reduction compared to those irradiated prior to inoculation. UV-C treatment after inoculation reduced the disease severity score by as much as 74 percent and reduced lesion number by as much as 68 percent (both at the 2.5 kJ m⁻² dose). This implies a direct germicidal effect of UV-C on *B. cinerea*.

Vase life of inflorescences treated with doses of 0.5, 1, and 2.5 kJ m⁻² UV-C were about the same as the control. However, exposure at 2.5 and 5 kJ m⁻² UV-C did cause some symptoms of phytotoxicity, namely petal discoloration after three days.

The research concluded that UV-C may be used as part of an integrated postharvest disease management program for freesia.

Darras, A.I., D.C. Joyce, L.A. Terry, 2010. "Postharvest UV-C irradiation on cut Freesia hybrid L. inflorescences suppresses petal specking caused by Botrytis cinerea." Postharvest Biology and Technology. 55, pp. 186-188.

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GROWER *Profile*

Megan Bame

Becky Devlin

Back Bay Flower Company, Virginia Beach, Virginia

Some growers might be envious when they hear that Becky Devlin's biggest challenge to growing flowers is getting the work done with her four children underfoot. Located in southeastern Virginia Beach, Virginia, Becky says, "I've got a great climate, an awesome tractor and good soil." She also has a green thumb. With professional training as a graphic designer, her horticultural knowledge comes from experience. She had been growing flowers in her home garden and sharing them with friends, who would often comment, "You should sell these." Her parents had a one-acre field that provided her more space, and eight years ago, she decided to give it a try.

Four years ago, Becky and her husband bought a larger property that would better accommodate their growing family and the now-established flower business. This year she estimates that she'll use three acres for field production. After scaling back last year, she's ramping up production for a new market this year.

Back Bay Flower Co. bouquets can be found at the Old Beach Farmers Market, which is located in a resort area

of town. This year, Becky plans to double her booth space at the Market. In addition, she is offering weekly CSA subscriptions, with limited availability and a higher cost for delivered subscriptions (driving around town is a task Becky particularly dislikes). Her newest marketing venture, though, will be online sales. Having fielded requests from different cities, she believes there may be a wholesale demand she can supply.

Organic or Not?

Last year, Becky was a certified organic farm. While she will continue using organic field practices, she did not seek recertification this year. She explains the several reasons. First, she did not see an increase in sales due to "organic" status. In fact, she says some farmers' market customers seemed perplexed as to why there would be value in organic flowers since they aren't eaten. They placed more value on the fact that she was a local producer. Most of her market customers already had an appreciation for Becky's sustainable, eco-friendly practices.

Another factor affecting her decision to forego certification was based on flower quality and vase life. Few organic postharvest products prove as effective as non-organic options. While Becky doesn't use silver thiosulphate or other harsh



products, she did notice quality deterioration compared to her holding solution and "conventional" products. One place Becky thought certification might make a difference to customers was online. With the launch of online sales, she will have the opportunity to find out.

One market angle she's previously featured will be downplayed this year—wedding services. While she's certain the farmers' market will generate interest in wedding flowers, she won't be promoting her services as a wedding floral designer. Instead she'll try to cater to the do-it-yourself brides, who can be directed to the web site to order flower bunches that can be shipped and then arranged by someone else.

Becky's primary crops include lilies, sunflowers, zinnias, dahlias (though last year was a tough season), gladiolus, celosia and lisianthus. She doesn't grow many woodies, but may look to expand those offerings in the future. Right now, the varieties include 'Limelight' hydrangea, English roses and greenery for bouquet filler. This year she was awarded an ASCFG Grower Grant to trial lilacs in zone 8. The trial will include 40 heat-tolerant varieties that she will evaluate for southern performance.



Important Connections

Becky has been a member of the ASCFG for six years and has enjoyed getting to know fellow growers, often building friendships without ever having met someone, but sharing a common interest. She notes there is a growing network of growers connecting on Facebook. Becky utilizes the internet and social media to promote her business. She maintains a blog, Facebook “fan” page, and Twitter account to supplement her web site presence www.backbayflower.com. In the near future, she may move the blog, named Sugar from Sunshine, to her Web site to simplify navigation.

She’s found the Facebook presence is most effective to communicate with customers and network with fellow ASCFG members. Last year, she teamed up with a fellow farmers’ market vendor to offer a wine and flowers special to their first 20 customers. They advertised only on Facebook and had a great response. In March she had more than 100 Facebook fans and more than 400 followers on Twitter.

Becky explains that web site development is one aspect of graphic design, so she’s at home on at the computer or in the field. This winter she’s been working on web sites for some fellow cut flower growers she met at the Long Island conference. The field work will be calling soon though.

Becky’s oldest two children are school age and the younger two are now in pre-school. The oldest, at 13 years old, is eager to make money and therefore more interested in helping Becky. Her 10-year-old daughter enjoys going to the market, but often helps the most by babysitting the younger kids. Pre-school hours are from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and it never fails to amaze Becky just how much she can accomplish during those four short hours of solitude on the farm. It looks like the business is poised to grow as the children become less dependent. Already this summer, Becky is looking to hire two employees, one to help with field work and one to assist with floral design and bouquet making. It’s an exciting period of growth and new ventures for Back Bay Flower Co. and the Devlin family.

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Back to BASICS

John W. Inman P.E.

Buying a Used Tractor

Even a used tractor is a major farming investment, so it is important to find good reliable used tractors that will not require major repairs in the near future.

In my opinion, there are five sources of used tractors: local farm machinery dealers, used farm machinery dealers, friends or neighbors, farm auctions or dispersal sales, and commercial farm equipment auctions. Some of these sources may offer a better opportunity to obtain a reliable tractor than others, but none of the sources should be overlooked in the search.

- **Local dealers** There are advantages to buying from a local dealer. That dealer may know some useful history – who the tractor’s previous owner was, how the tractor was used and when it was serviced. It is possibly the dealer may even have or can get the tractor’s past service records. Based on the condition of the used tractor, local dealers may provide a guarantee of some sort, and it is likely they will be around to support the tractor in the future. Dealers will sometimes also have lease return tractors offered at significantly reduced prices. These are usually newer models that have from a few hundred to a few thousand hours of use.

- **Used machinery dealers** In some cases used machinery dealers may be able to offer some of the same advantages as local dealers. Regardless, it is good to find out as much as possible about the tractor. The machinery dealer may have just bought the tractor at an auction and have no idea of the history or condition of the tractor.

- **Friends or neighbors** If you are considering buying a used tractor from a friend or neighbor, you probably already have some idea how that seller treats his equipment. You may be able to obtain the tractor’s history which can help you evaluate its condition.

- **Farm auctions** Farm auctions can sometimes provide good buys on tractors. However, prices at farm auctions have been known to go higher than normal market prices. Tractor sales at auctions are final, so if you discover problems with a tractor bought at auction after the sale, you usually have no recourse on the seller. If you are considering bidding on a tractor at an auction, inspect it thoroughly. Also, insist on starting the tractor and check it when it is running.

- **Commercial auctions** The same no-recourse problems occur when purchasing tractors at commercial farm machinery auctions. The action at these auctions is even faster, and there is less opportunity to inspect the tractor. These auction sales are designed for farm equipment dealers



Avoid Grey Market Tractors

Buyers need to beware of “grey market” tractors – used compact diesel models imported from another country, most often Japan, with brands such as Yanmar, Mitsubishi, Iseki and others. The main attraction of these tractors is that they cost less than domestically used machines.

Because they were built for the foreign market, grey market tractors often do not meet U.S. safety standards. In some cases, the power takeoff runs in the opposition direction or at different speeds than on tractors manufactured for sale in the American market. Even US dealers who carry the same brands as grey market tractors will not have replacement parts for the gray market tractors, and there will have been no dealer training or support provided by the manufacturers.

Evaluate the Tractor Externally

When evaluating a used tractor, there are a number of external factors to consider.

- Examine all shafts, bearings, seals, and gaskets for grease and oil leaks. Dust and dirt accumulations over old grease spots are generally not indicative of a major leak. However, oil and grease spots on the ground underneath the tractor and large fresh grease spots on the tractor’s surface can indicate potential major problems.

- The coolant in the radiator should be clear and clean. If it looks dirty and muddy, the cooling system may require major service and/or repairs.

Leaks in the cooling system are also indicative of potential problems. Check radiator hoses for cracks lost of flexibility – neither is desirable.

- The tractor frame, transmission housing and final drives should be closely examined for evidence of cracks and welds. Welds on the tractor frame or major castings indicate the tractor has undergone hard use and such tractors should be avoided.

- A new paint job may make the tractor look good but can also be used to cover up a variety of problems. Ask why the tractor was repainted. The same can be said if a new seat, seat cushions, steering wheel or other obvious replacements are covering up other wear problems.

Checking Internal Operations

Generally speaking, it is not a good idea to buy a tractor with internal problems, so it is important that you start the tractor and drive it. You may also want to have someone else drive while you observe the tractor and listen to the engine in operation.

- Blue or black exhaust smoke when the tractor is started or accelerated can indicate major engine problems. Blue smoke indicates that the engine is burning oil and probably needs major internal work. Black smoke can indicate overfueling for gasoline engines and faulty combustion for a diesel engine.

- Listen for engine and transmission noises. Knocking or other unusual noises from the engine when it is idling can indicate major engine problems. When the tractor is being driven, whining or grinding noises from the transmission and final drive are not normal. The clutch should engage smoothly and gear shifting should be smooth and easy.

- A compression test is the best way to check the condition of the tractor engine. The test, done by a good mechanic who

Types of Tractors

Tractors can be divided into types based on the jobs the tractor manufacturer designed them to do. When looking for a used tractor, it helps to know what type you need.

- Utility tractors were designed for multiple tasks, including soil tillage, and they can be equipped with a variety of attachments – loaders, rotary tillers, planters, blades, mowers and other specialty equipment.

- Cultivating tractors were designed primarily for cultivating row crops such as vegetables.
- Orchard tractors are low to the ground and narrow in width to fit between trees.



Older Tractors

An older tractor can be a good value. Parts and repairs are still available for certain makes and models.

Utility tractors as such as the Ford 8N, Jubilee, 600 and 800, Ferguson TO 35, Massey Ferguson 50 and 65 are affordable, and parts can be easily found. Some of these tractors were also manufactured in orchard configurations. Larger Farmall models such as the Farmall H and M are still widely available.

Older tractors such as the Allis Chalmers G and the Farmall Cub, A, B and C are classic cultivating tractors and have proven particularly useful to small specialty crop growers. They are still available as used tractors and parts can be obtained for them even today.

There are numerous other older used tractors available today at affordable prices.

The major issue in buying an older tractor is usually parts availability, which can be easily be checked out on the internet.

can also interpret the results, can detect such problems such as burned or damaged valves, worn cylinder walls and piston rings, and blown head gaskets.

Make Your Used Tractor Safe

Safety is often an issue with used tractors. This is because safety shields for the power take off (PTO) shaft are often missing and decals that include operating instructions and safety warning are often faded or missing.

In an ideal world, the seller should provide these items, but that is sometimes not the case. It may be necessary for you to obtain them from a dealer after you purchase the tractor.

Having an operator's manual is important because it is your first-line resource to the use and care of the tractor.

It provides how-to operating instructions, routine servicing and maintenance instructions, contacts of the manufacturer and/or dealer and safety information.

Preferably the operator's manual for your tractor will be available from the seller, but these booklets do have a way of getting misplaced or too worn to use. A simple internet search for tractor manuals will lead to sources of manuals for hundreds of tractor models.

John Inman, a retired agricultural engineer from University of California-Davis, is a farm machinery consultant and freelance writer.

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Transforming *Rudbeckia* into a Fall-flowering Cut Flower

Rudbeckia hirta is a colorful perennial species that produces yellow to red-brown flowers, just the right cut item for fall markets. Unfortunately, under the short daylengths of late summer and fall, these plants fail to flower, or produce flowers with very short stems. Past work has shown that *Rudbeckia* requires long days for flowering. Would it be possible to install solar-powered landscape lights in the production field to simulate long days? To answer that, we need to know how much light is needed, and if landscape lights can produce that light intensity. Thanks to funding from the ASCFG Research Foundation, we set out to answer both questions.

In a preliminary experiment in the greenhouse we planted *Rudbeckia* ‘Prairie Sun’ in pots at right angles to a row of fluorescent ‘button’ lights, as used to light under counters in the kitchen (Fig. 1). The lights extended the daylength to 16 hours, after they had gotten 12 hours of light the rest of the day. The light intensity decreased for plants farther from the lights, and we could determine the distance at which the plants still had adequate stem length, and relate it to the light intensity of the light extension.

The light intensity of the extended daylength source varied from 4 $\mu\text{moles}/\text{m}^2/\text{sec}$ close to the light bar, to 0.5 $\mu\text{moles}/\text{m}^2/\text{sec}$ at the farthest pot. Plant height showed a similar pattern, with greatest stem length at about 3 $\mu\text{moles}/\text{m}^2/\text{sec}$ light intensity (Fig. 2).

Thus for optimum stem extension of *Rudbeckia* in late-season trials, a light intensity of 3 $\mu\text{moles}/\text{m}^2/\text{sec}$ needs to be achieved.

We then planted ‘Prairie Sun’ and ‘Cherry Brandy’ in a high tunnel on July 28 for fall flowering and exposed them to three treatments: (1) natural light only (2) light extension with solar-powered landscape lights having 6 LEDs (Fig. 3) and (3) light extension using mains-powered button lights.

As the daylength became shorter in late summer, stem growth in the unlighted plants stayed short, whereas those exposed to 16-hr daylength of mains lights started to elongate normally.

Plants under solar lights were intermediate in reaction (Table 1). By the end of the harvest season, stem length and yield were greatest under the mains “kitchen style” lights, and the plants under solar lamps were a distant second. Measurement of the light intensity in the plots revealed the reason: the solar lights produced a bright, concentrated beam of light in one spot, with virtually no coverage over the rest of the plants. The mains lights had a more even distribution. This indicates that currently available solar landscape lights are not suited for use of stimulating the



Fig. 1. *Rudbeckia* ‘Prairie Sun’ on a light gradient bench, with plants closest to the lights flowering, and those farthest away still vegetative.

daylength response of *Rudbeckia*, but that a 9-watt fluorescent fixture every 6 ft. is sufficient to stimulate stem extension. ‘Cherry Brandy’ was not as productive as ‘Prairie Sun’, and was also later to come to flower. We will continue our search for suitable solar lights: Christmas tree lights, one per plant, are next. Stay tuned!

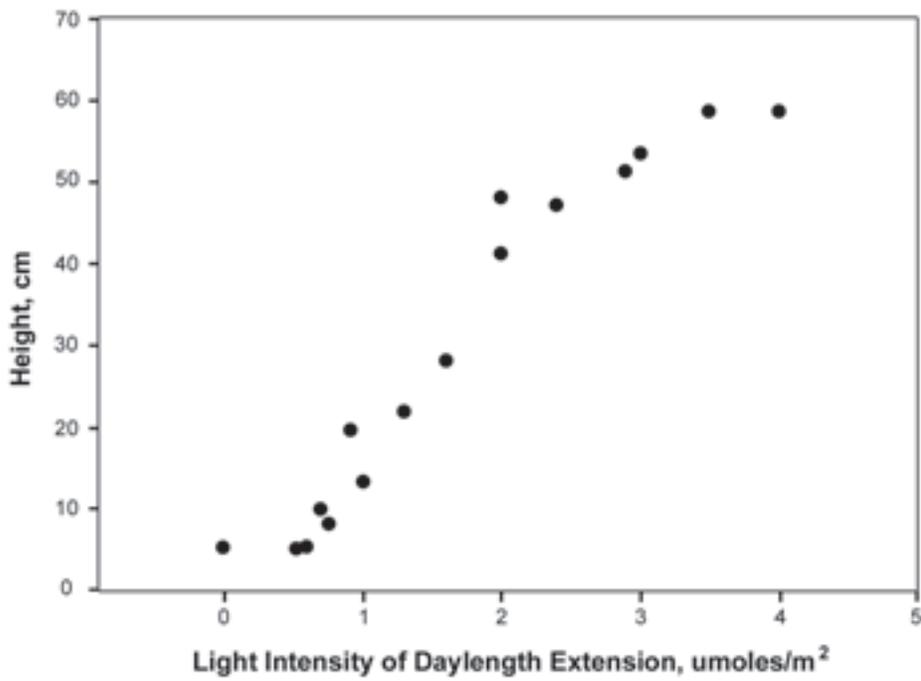


Fig. 2. The relationship of the light intensity of the daylength extension to the height of *Rudbeckia hirta* 'Prairie Sun' at flowering.



Fig. 3. Solar lights on *Rudbeckia* in the high tunnel. Note the tall plant next to the lights, but short ones in foreground, where lights did not reach. Next plot down the row: no lights; far plot: button lights. Black curtain eliminates stray light from adjacent plots.

Table 1. The effect of the type of light used to extend daylength in the fall on *Rudbeckia hirta* grown in a high tunnel, on stem length, yield and earliness.

Treatments	Stem length, cm		Stems/plant		First flower date, DAS	
	Prairie Sun	Cherry Brandy	Prairie Sun	Cherry Brandy	Prairie Sun	Cherry Brandy
Control	18	42	3.7	2.5	117	134
Solar lights	36	44	5.6	2.3	109	135
Mains lights	68	68	8.7	5.2	115	129
Stat. signif. Treatments	***		**		n.s.	
Varieties	***		***		***	
Vars. x Treats.	***		n.s.		n.s.	

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From the ARCHIVES

Janet Foss

Spicy Orange in the Mix

Originally printed in “Lemons and Lemonade” January 2001

The Color Marketing Organization is projecting that blues are the color of the decade, but oranges and dull reds will be used to energize blue. While it appears the bright “spicy oranges” will be most popular orange hue this year, next year more shades of oranges are expected to be in. It may be time to consider growing some orange flowers to meet this projected demand. There is not much in “spicy orange” brighter than *Tithonia*, the subject of an intense list serve discussion, which got me thinking about orange for cut flowers.

I grew *Tithonia rotundifolia* a few years back, actually when this same marketing group said oranges and reds would be popular, due to the influence of the Olympics in Spain. *Tithonia* grew tall with long stems, and it was easy to cut. But it did have its problems, such as breaking if you looked at it wrong, deciding for itself whether or not it would hold up in a vase. These flowers with minds of their own can drive flower growers crazy. It sold well—once—to every florist, but very few were willing to try it again.

I admit I haven't tried tithonia since all the hydrating solutions have come on the market, so I'm thinking of trying it again, since it's a color of choice. This year I plan to use a foliar calcium spray to see if the stem might be stronger, and if the blooms last longer. Last time I transplanted young plants while they were strong and healthy, this time I want to try direct sowing. I also want to experiment with hydrating solution, hoping to have a more reliable cut. The last time I grew tithonia 'Goldfinger' which is an annual, the plants were 5 to 6 feet tall, they were very

colorful and nice in the field and bloomed from mid summer until frost. Benary offers a shorter tithonia, 'Fiesta Del Sol'; it is bred for pots, and grows 24 inches tall.

Euphorbia griffithii 'Fireglow' is a perennial that blooms early in the spring. With its clusters of small, bright orange-red flowers, plants truly do look like glowing fire. It's actually the bracts that are colorful and in small clusters. The plants grow about two feet tall, and can be picked at ground level, easily giving up a 20- to 24-inch stem. The stems, where cut or leaves are stripped, excrete a milky sap that burns or causes allergic reactions to some people. The sap may also affect other flowers that are in the same container especially when freshly



Leonotis leonurus

cut. I always use latex gloves when cutting or handling euphorbias and dispose of them when I'm finished.

My method of controlling the sap is to bunch the cut stems in the field, and to lay the bunches in a cool place until they seal off, about twenty minutes. The bunches then are put in buckets with hydrating solution to rehydrate and prepare for selling. It may take several hours for stems to total hydrate and

harden off. Other methods of controlling sap it to sear the cut ends in a flame or boiling water, but neither of these methods has been practical or cost effective for me, nor do they produce a superior cut product. Another method that has worked equally well is to put fresh cut euphorbias immediately in water with hydrating solution, using the prescribed time and method. The hydrating solution should be discarded after it becomes mixed with *Euphorbia* sap.

Euphorbia griffithii 'Fireglow' is propagated from root cuttings; it can be purchased in plugs or bareroot. It spreads by creeping rhizomes (long fat roots), it spreads fast in moist soil, and is impossible to keep in place, but in well drained soils the rhizomes stay shorter and

the plant is more refined and easier to control. Tilling can be used to control 'Fireglow' if it moves out of its space, but spraying the shoots that have spread out of the bed will damage the plants in the bed if the roots are still connected. 'Fireglow' blooms in early spring; in the garden it will remain a nice plant all season and with nice fall color. It's one of the first non-bulb perennials to bloom, and the nicest, most intense blooms are taken from the plants once they

are fully colored, but still during the cool season. Bloom time varies a bit with the weather; years that the winters are cold it blooms faster and more prolifically than when the winter conditions are mild. Other cultivars of *Euphorbia griffithii* may be equally nice for cutting. It is rated to grow in zones 5-9 and is a sturdy cut that could likely be shipped.

Geum chiloense 'Lady Bradshaw' is another bright orange flower that would



Tithonia rotundifolia 'Sundance'

energize blue. The seed was easy to germinate, plants were grown on in plugs (72s) and transplanted out in early June. They made very good growth the first season, but did not flower. The second season they began flowering in May and were especially productive through June, and on a more limited schedule throughout the season. Each two-foot stem produced bright reddish orange flowers, with several buds and one open bloom, which was about one and a half inches in diameter. The primary flower was the nicest, the secondary flowers opened in water, not as large and not always keeping the vibrant color. The stems are slim and not leafy so there isn't much stripping required. Geum appreciates good garden soil, moisture in the summer, and good drainage in the winter. The variety I grew was 'Lady Bradshaw Improved'. There was a lot of variation in the plants, many were very double, with large flowers, but some were single and smaller. I can't say I was super excited about this plant, but it sold well, even had repeat customers. It lasted well in a vase and had no special conditioning requirements. Harvesting consisted of bunching 18- to 20-inch long stems in the field, twenty stems per bunch; it was shipped and stored in water. This perennial can be grown from seeds, plugs or divisions.

Geum chilense and *Tithonia* are both fragile flowers that would best sold on the local market. *Euphorbia griffithii* 'Fireglow' is sturdier and could handle longer distance shipping.

Quite a few orange flowers make good cut flowers, and might be worth growing while orange is cool (or hot!). Some annual orange flowers are *Cosmos sulphureus*, dahlias, zinnias, snapdragons, celosia, Iceland and Oriental poppies, marigolds, ornamental peppers, sunflowers like 'Soraya' and 'Sonja', safflower, and *Leonotis*. Perennials include *Kniphofia*, *Crocsmia*, tiger lilies, *Lilium pardalinuin*, gloriosa lily, alstroemeria, *Penstemon barbatus* 'Iron Maiden', *Asclepias tuberosa*, *Trollius ledebourii*, and berries of *Arum italicum*. roses, viburnum, pyracantha and bittersweet are shrubs that would provide some orange.



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Perennial Season Extension Trial

Susan Wright, Shady Grove Gardens & Nursery, Vilas, North Carolina

This research grant was started in 2008. At the time of the grant award, some of the sought-after varieties were unavailable. The 2008 drought caused much of the planting to be pushed back to 2009. We also ran into space limitations as some of the field areas where they were to be planted, were overrun with pernicious, perennial grass.

2009 was another tough year in our area with almost constant rain until September. Spraying, fertilization, weeding and even harvest were often delayed. 2009 started out with a deep late May freeze that nipped some of the heleniums in pots.

Our farm is in the mountains of North Carolina in zone 6. We have been experimenting with several perennial varieties, using pinching as a means of lengthening their bloom period. We chose the varieties because they are relatively easy to grow and we wanted these varieties to have bloom periods long enough for our customers to get to know the flowers. We especially wanted the orange and red heleniums to bloom later when those colors are “in” for fall.

The varieties used were: *Phlox* ‘David’, ‘unknown late pink’, and ‘Blue Paradise’; *Helenium* ‘Coppelia’, ‘Mardi Gras’, ‘Flamenspiel’, ‘Kanaria’, and ‘Tiny Dancer’. That’s how it all started anyway. *Helenium autumnale* species was unavailable so we substituted *Helenium* ‘Red Shades,’ which was started from seed in 2008.

Some important notes on what we learned right away: *Helenium* should be planted in the spring, not the fall. *Helenium flexuosum* ‘Tiny Dancer’ rotted in pots over the winter. All of the *Helenium* and *Phlox* varieties get

powdery mildew, even when sprayed with organic solutions. Other pest problems that now limit our interest in these varieties include red spider mites and (possible) downy mildew on *Phlox* ‘David’, aphids on the yellow ‘Kanaria’ helenium, and worm issues on either the buds or flowers of all the *Helenium* and *Phlox* varieties. Starting in 2008, we had deer eating the phlox as they reside in our rented field where we aren’t allowed to operate our electric fence during the summer.

During 2008 many of the heleniums were kept in pots due to their size and our lack of prepared bed space. Most were planted in the fall of 2008.

The phlox fared much better. ‘David’ was divided in spring of 2008 but all were cut to the ground due to red spider mites and (possible) downy mildew. They were full and ready to pinch in 2009. ‘Late Pink’ was divided in spring of 2009. However, it was not established long enough to give accurate results. ‘Blue Paradise,’ my new favorite phlox, overwintered well and bloomed shorter than normal during the 2009 season.

Each variety was divided into thirds: one-third for the control, one-third for the first pinch in mid-May, and one-third for the later pinch in mid-June. We followed this fairly well, leaving only the ‘Kanaria’ unpinched as it was taken over by (and survived) a massive infestation of running mustard.

Given the 2008-2009 data limitations, we will continue our experiment into 2010, when we will hopefully have comparable sizes of mature perennials, to establish more accurate results. So far, there is great variety in initial bloom time, as well as response to pinching.

The following charts list pinches and bloom times as well as notes and comments on each variety.

***Helenium* ‘Kanaria’:** All were soft pinched late due to major weed, then powdery mildew issues. It bloomed 7-10 days later than normal and we sold several bunches to a florist. The soft pinch did not change the bloom period. It was available August 10 to September 5 in both 2008 and 2009.

***Helenium* ‘Coppelia’:** These were lost over winter for the third time. We used our nursery stock quarts, planted in spring 2009 for the trial. One of our earliest to bloom most years, this flower is deep red. Pinching did not change the height on this one. All were only 12-18". This weak variety should be taller at maturity if we could get it to overwinter.

***Helenium* ‘Flamenspiel’:** The most vigorous of the red heleniums. I suspect this ‘Flamenspiel’ is really another variety altogether. It is not blooming red like past ‘Flickering Flame’ stock.

***Helenium* ‘Mardi Gras’:** This robust, early helenium needs another year for results. We didn’t plant it until July 15th. It may require netting or staking.

***Helenium* ‘Red Shades’:** Pinching delayed this variety’s bloom into September, like we were hoping. However, it needs a full year in the ground for accurate results. It is easy and inexpensive to grow from seed. It substituted for *Helenium autumnale*.

***Phlox* ‘David’:** I have been surprised by the disease and pest problems on this one. In 2008, we cut them all to the ground in midsummer. 2009 was a bit better, with more mature divisions. They should be worth the extra effort to extend the bloom period.

Phlox 'Late Pink': We chose this seedling selection for its late disease resistant nature. So far, it's continued to overachieve. 2010 will allow us to get more accurate results from the younger divisions.

Phlox 'Blue Paradise': Pinching may not be necessary, as this one reblooms readily. This is our favorite variety of *Phlox* and the customers love it too.

Species/ variety	Pinch #1	Pinch#2	Control bloom dates	Control's height	Pinch #1 bloom dates	Pinch #1 height	Pinch #2 bloom dates	Pinch #2 height
Phlox 'David'	5/16	6/15	7/19-9/6	24"+	8/23-9/19	18-24"	deer	blank
Phlox 'Blue Paradise'	5/17	6/15	6/28-7/11 re bloom 8/23-9/5	12-18"	7/12-7/18 re bloom 9/5-9/12	12-18"	8/23-9/5 re bloom 9/19	12-18"
Phlox 'Late Pink'	5/17	6/15 wilted upon division 5/22	8/2-9/5	24"+	8/23-9/12	24"+	8/30-9/26	8-24"
Helenium 'Mardi Gras'	Soft pinch in pots	1st cut 7/5-8/15 acted as pinch			7/5-8/15	12-18"	10/3-10/10 re bloom on all plants	12-18"
Helenium 'Flamenspiel'	5/16	6/15	8/9-9/5	24"+	8/16-9/12	24"	8/16-9/12	18"
Helenium 'Kanaria'	Late soft pinch				8/16-8/29	36"		
Helenium	5/16	6/15	8/2-8/8	18-24"	9/19-9/25	12-18"	No bloom	
Helenium 'Coppelia'	5/21 not planted until 5/26	6/15	8/2-8/8	12-18"	8/16-8/22	12-18"	8/30-9/5	12-18"

Species/Variety	Planting Notes	Pinching Notes	Disease/Pests	Inputs	Marketing	Comments
Phlox 'David'	Divided spring of 2008	1st pinch bloomed through 9/19	Extreme disease pressure 2008 during drought. 5/20/09 already getting PM	5/21 sprayed Rhapsody= Cease Beneficial nematodes added for stem borers 5/25	Nice to have white later in the season	Deer ate the 2nd pinch near the end of the season
Phlox 'Blue Paradise'	Planted as gallons in Fall 2008	All groups rebloomed to 9/19 no real delay from 1st pinch	Powdery Mildew resistant	5/21 sprayed Rhapsody= Cease Beneficial nematodes added for stem borers 5/25	Nice color & re bloom, all sold well	Short & stocky when pinched
Phlox 'Late Pink'	Divided in spring of 2009 except control	Pinching extended bloom to 9/26	This one is late to bloom & disease resistant	5/21 sprayed Rhapsody=Cease	These do not sell in straight bunches	Divisions too young for good data, some deer pressure
Helenium 'Mardi Gras'	Planted 7/15/09 in bloom. Cut and counted thru 8/15	Soft pinched early in pots due to late freeze. 1st pinch was 1st cut	Full size gallons flopped after planting without netting	5/21 sprayed Rhapsody= Cease Beneficial nematodes added for stem borers 5/25	This one may need netting. Reblooms were all bent	2nd year data not representative of normal bloom times. Rebloom is October.
Helenium 'Flamenspiel'	Vigorous & hardy over-wintered 08-09	The only red with good data 2009 pinching made fuller & shorter		5/21 sprayed Rhapsody= Cease Beneficial nematodes added for stem borers 5/25	These do not look like 'Flamenspiel' rather a mix with yellows.	Pinching had minimal effect on bloom time. All bloomed thru 9/5, #1 & #2 bloomed thru 9/12
Helenium 'Kanaria' (Canary)	These are strong vigorous, hardy plants	Soft pinched due to extreme mustard pressure	Powdery Mildew every year some worm and beetle problems.	5/21 sprayed Rhapsody= Cease Beneficial nematodes added for stem borers 5/25	All were sold to one florist in spite of the PM	131 stems from only 15 plants
Helenium 'Red Shades'	Only 9 Planted 5/26/09 2nd year plants from seed. Gallon pots.	Pinching made shorter and fuller	Few beetle and worm problems	5/21 sprayed Rhapsody= Cease Beneficial nematodes added for stem borers 5/25	Nice color mix	Too young for good results. A seed variety used to replace Helenium autumnale that was unavailable
Helenium 'Coppelia'	These died the winter of 08-09 we used Quarts as replacements 5/26/09	Pinching stretched out bloom 8/2-9/19	Few beetle and worm problems	5/21 sprayed Rhapsody= Cease. Beneficial nematodes added for stem borers 5/25	Beautiful deep color	Not vigorous or especially hardy

REGIONAL Reports



NORTHEAST

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We are going to have to gather up the fragments of knowledge and responsibilities that have been turned over to governments, corporations, and specialists, and put those fragments back together again in our own minds and in our families and household and neighborhoods.

Wendell Berry

It's getting busy, and we are all consumed with the day-to-day tasks that propel the frantic summer season. As my to-do list fills up, I cannot help but think back to a rainy day in late February that may impact my future a lot more than the shipment of dahlia cuttings or my propane bill. Not only my future, but perhaps yours as well, so I want to take this space to share some of these thoughts with all of you.

It was with a bit of trepidation that Mike and I joined the sixty or so farmers, land trust board members, state leaders and non-profit leaders at a "Farm 2.0: RI Farming in the 21st Century" conference. Fortunately, the weather was late-winter dreadful, sleety rain driving down, so we were grateful not to be outside working. But would the day be useful, would it make a difference? Although it is too early to tell, I think the answer may well be yes, and I think the issues addressed are worth talking to the whole region about, as Rhode Island is but a microcosm of our shared concerns.

A short list of these shared issues:

- protecting our remaining farmland
- keeping farmland affordable for farmers
- keeping farmland in agricultural use
- enabling farmers who farm protected farmland to build equity in their operation
- keeping agriculture economically viable
- building community understanding of, and support for, farming activities

One day was hardly enough to tackle it all, but we had a super list of regional leaders there as resources from Long Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. We were organized into brainstorm sessions on each of the above topics, and each person could attend two of the sessions. I want to share with you two

of what I consider to be the best ideas that you can bring to discussions with your fellow farmers and communities.

The development pressure on farmland may have somewhat abated in the last year and a half, but it will continue to be truly dire as more farmers age out of active production and prices for land continue to rebound. All agreed there needs to be serious work done to reform regulations around not only transfer of land between generations (how soon are inheritance taxes due? at what rate?) but what does it really mean to purchase development rights to farmland and what restrictions can be made to ensure that that purchase does keep the land in agriculture? In Rhode Island, our development right program really only ensures open space, and frequently the land is priced out of the range of new farmers and is instead sold for its "estate" value. Sound familiar? Massachusetts is tackling this with provisions that make the state have the right to disallow the sale of protected farms to other than actual farmers. (More at <http://www.mass.gov/agr/landuse/APR/index.htm>). With luck, this will work. What provisions does your state have?

More to the point for the local issues, one of the best ideas that I heard was about increasing the community awareness of farming through an Agricultural Commission. Maybe you have one or another town board where issues relating to farms can be reviewed, and heard. If you do, I encourage you to find out more about it, or look into working with it at least in the off-season. Here in Rhode Island, there are none. We heard from Peter Westover of Massachusetts about the difference it can make when the zoning and planning boards can really hear from farmers about the issues facing your town. Here's an overview from him:

- AgComs represent the farming community, encourage the pursuit of agriculture, promote agricultural economic development and protect farmlands and farm businesses, and preserve, revitalize and sustain agricultural businesses and land.
- In some communities they focus on farmland preservation efforts, while in others they review regulatory proposals developed by other town boards (planning board, board of health, conservation commission, etc), or provide marketing coordination to assist all farms in town.
- Others have played key roles in mediating farmer/neighbor disputes, or simply providing referrals for farmers needing better information.
- By working within town government through an AgCom, farmers enhance their credibility, and are viewed as part of the problem-solving team.

Here's more information: <http://www.massagcom.org/starting/starting.html>

Mike and I have already spoken to our town planner, and we are excited to make an agriculture commission happen in our town. As one member of my brainstorming session said "I'm on the planning board, and we have a conservation commission, a historical commission, a wind power commission, and so on. Agriculture is the only segment of town NOT being heard."

This matters to all of us, even if, as is the case for me, you have only a few acres and/or don't see yourself as "agriculture". We need other farmers in the farmers' markets and stores, in our towns, and for our economy. We are farmers, or we benefit from farms. It's that simple.

Yeah, yeah, I know, you're BUSY. We're all busy. But look what's been happening to our farms while we weren't doing anything about it. Can we really afford to keep this trend going? In Rhode Island, we have lost 80% of our farms since 1945. Don't let this happen to you. These are two ideas worth spreading around, maybe to your customer on the planning board or your contacts at the state level, but worth at least talking about.

Now, back to flowers! The Regional Meeting this year will be in Ithaca, New York, July 19-20. More information to follow later.



MID-ATLANTIC

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This morning I woke up to the tinny strings of "Here comes the bride," echoing in my head as I tried to shake off a nightmare of sorts. Picture a crowd of designers, myself included, wrestling over the design of a bride's bouquet. Not just a bride's bouquet, THE bride's bouquet. We weren't fighting, however, we were just adding...and adding and adding and adding. A little bloom here, wrapped with a little vine there, accents of ornamental grass, dangling bits, spikes a plenty, arcs of ribbon - it just kept getting bigger and bigger. At the moment I woke I counted 3 pairs of hands holding it. This year we're taking on more events than ever, so naturally this is a situation we wish to avoid.

Special events and weddings are the fastest growing part of our business. We have already exceeded our budgeted event income set in January. We are busy making sure all will be in place so we can meet each bride's expectations. Planning early in the season helps us to organize every aspect of each event, create schedules and build in redundancy to our operation, should/when Mother Nature lets us know she's still boss, essentially schedule in time for when things go wrong. Right

now everything looks good on paper, but I recognize delivering premium designs to our brides AND meet our market customers' expectations will take collaborative effort from a team of people, not just me.

In the past we've worked on a contract basis with talented designers, hired here and there throughout the season for specific events. This year we recognized the need for a consistent part-time event manager and designer on staff. One of my former employees has retired from her previous employment, much to our delight, and is eager to come on board. Highly skilled in management and experienced as a very small scale grower, her main concern was gaining confidence with the design process itself. So we built in-house design instruction into our plans as a regular event.

Just conceptualizing about how floral design education might work on our farm made me aware of how much I would benefit from it, too. With a degree in architecture I have a strong foundation in the principles of design, but the application of my experience toward floral design isn't always easy. I still wrestle with the best way to make boutonnières and corsages, the most efficient process for making centerpieces, the appropriate techniques for stabilizing/constructing large-scale pieces. I knew we'd all benefit from expert advice and I knew the perfect person to ask.

Last year Carol Caggiano, AIFD, PFCI gave an incredible design daylong presentation at the ASCFG National Conference. Carol is an internationally recognized floral designer and educator and is an valuable asset to the floral industry worldwide. Her expertise in floral design education specifically prompted me to call her last fall when I had been asked to give a design demonstration utilizing original art pieces at the Washington Craft Show in downtown DC. Together, we collaborated on how I might structure such a demo, and in between we dashed to the studio as she showed me some simple tricks and techniques for making pomander balls and perfecting spiral hand-tied bouquets. I could have kept her there all day, firing question after question.

When I explained our plans for on-site floral design education, she agreed that it was an excellent idea stressing "On-the-job is one of the most valuable sources of education in the industry." Unfortunately for us, she's not available to teach here until fall. We realize that not every grower/designer has such a resource living "down the street" and even if you do, it takes time and planning to coordinate an effective program. So, if not Carol, then who? I asked Carol for her recommendations and she admitted it was a difficult question to answer as "everyone's needs and expectations are so different." Here are her recommendations and comments for some of the best programs in the industry:

Online: Classes offered through the American Institute of Floral Designers www.AIFD.org

Locally: Check to see if your state offers floral design education courses. Carol cited strong programs available Michigan, Ohio and Texas.

Nationally:

- Phil Rulloda, Southern California School of Floral Design, Anaheim, (714) 776-7445, www.philrulloda.com
- Leanne Kessler, Floral Design Institute, Portland, Oregon, (800) 819-8089, www.flowerschool.com
- Jim Johnson, Benz School of Floral Design, College Station, TX, (979) 845-0627, aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/benz

Internationally:

- Isabel Palmer, The Green Academy, Drongen, Belgium, 32-473818298, www.greenacademybelgium.com
“Pretty fabulous but definitely for serious designers.”
- “Paula Pryke and Jane Packer are two English designers who are well known here in the States, and I would think their programs would be well suited to the specialty cut flower grower.”

Carol mentioned that Germany and Holland can get very intricate and intense in their floral design, so she would recommend them only to the most serious and committed floral artist.

Realizing it's a little late to jet off to Belgium, instead, we're busy building our library of design books, adding to our own portfolio and creating our own books by photographing what we create during our design classes. We also plan to take advantage of several design education opportunities offered through our local wholesaler and OF COURSE attending the Lilytopia professional symposium and our upcoming Mid-Atlantic Regional Meeting! Hope to see you all there!



SOUTHEAST

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Here are a few thoughts on things to consider in your business planning process.

Think about your knowledge of growing flowers. Growing flowers is different than growing vegetables. It is important for you bottom line to learn about diseases and pests, soils and water quality. In addition to germination needs and growth habits, you will need to learn the difference between the beneficial insects and the chewing ones.

Gardeners beware. The first pitfall of flower farmers is maybe that you are a flower lover. Trying to grow hundreds of wonderful varieties in the first years will drive you out of the business. First, each has its own set of needs. Difficulty aside, some of these wonderful garden flowers will not sell at your market. Use constraint when choosing what to grow. Each new variety adds new work. It is always best to know how to grow it and where you are selling it before buy the seed.

Another early pitfall is lacking timing. Are you starting the crop early enough to succeed? Succession planting; I can't stress

enough the need to plan and implement succession planting. I learned this the hard way. Don't forget to plan bed space for those later crops. Somewhere without weeds.

One final pitfall of early flower farmers is making promises you can't keep. You didn't get into farming to raise your stress level, right? You'll have enough regular ups and downs of weather and pests. You need to know almost exactly when a crop will come in and how much it will produce if you're promising it to someone. Otherwise, you may never get that customer back if the crop fails to come in.

Another thing to consider when starting out is your personality. Are you a loner or outgoing? Direct marketing requires skill. Would you rather stay on the farm? If so, do you have someone to sell for you? Even wholesaling requires sales skill to go well. Networking; the best connections you will make are through friends, and fellow civic and church members.

You want to create a business, not a just a job for yourself. Think seriously about your money requirements. Remember that gross profits are not net returns. And if you are not sure what that means get help from someone that does. The average profitable garden center has a net return of 12% , which means for every \$1000 they make, their profit is only \$120. I suspect flower farms are not much different.

Other money considerations: Do you need money right away? Do you have start-up capital? Or can you start small with little income for awhile? Develop a plan, even a simple one, for each aspect of your business.

If you're not a numbers person you may avoid this planning. Numbers aren't fun but making a good living doing what you love is, so get someone to coach you or come to Tulsa for the ASCFG National Conference Quickbooks workshop. In western North Carolina there is a little money available through ASAP to help you purchase the Quickbooks program. There may be similar programs in your area through USDA's Risk Management program.

Accounting programs and spreadsheets will help you track your profits and losses, schedule your flowers and tell you what is making you money. I found tracking my labor costs to be invaluable. We should be tracking our time as well. The more information you have the better your decisions will be. You've heard this all before but make sure the records you keep are complete and accurate otherwise they are worthless. One missing week of market records will skew the entire year's records.

On a lighter note, a few more things to consider when planning you flower business. Your time versus helpers. Some markets require lots of driving, will you need an extra staff, vehicles and insurance? A few markets can be done directly from the farm saving you time and money. Will you make enough to hire someone to make an individual project happen? And as usual don't promise more than you can provide.

Still thinking about the shape and scope of your business I always am. Don't forget to consider your land and location. What works best for your size, slope and microclimates? Are you near enough to a city? Who's your market? Is it big enough? Will you need to ship and will you need a packing shed or cooler?

How will I extend my bloom season and succession plant? Will I grow all annuals? What do my buyers want and what am I good at? Most of all with all the above planning you will be able to decide if it is worth your time.

A few pieces of equipment I consider essential for a startup flower farm are a small greenhouse or potting shed with seed-starting capabilities, coldframes (for perennial or annual protection) and hand tools. Next on the list of requirements is a good water source and a cooler. Also extremely important: time, patience, money and a partner.

Marketing is important to any business. Each new market type adds another layer of paperwork. Become web savvy, write your own press releases, produce flyers for each type of market, write a blog, develop a e-mailing list, a price list and plan regular advertising if you are retail.

Bottom line: don't go around in a fog, plan to succeed.



MIDWEST

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Rush, rush, rush, seems to be the password for the grower at this time of year. Doesn't seem to matter what you choose to do at most any time, there is something else clamoring for your attention. Therefore, it is essential to set priorities. Sometimes it seems like a no-win situation, what has to be done vs. what has to be done. There are some things that just won't wait, e.g. picking flowers that have a very short window of readiness, spraying for bugs that are going to destroy the blooms by morning, or getting product to the consumer at the best possible time. Some things can wait until another day. The weeds will be there tomorrow (as long as the seeds are not 'spreading') and sometimes planting can wait another day. Some things are best done in the morning and others are best done in the evening (napping is best done when the sun is the hottest!).

So the question arises, is it cost effective to add more workers? This can be a very hard question to answer and sometimes similar conditions call for different answers. Plus, one has the problem of what kind of worker to hire. Most times it seems that we are restricted to the type of worker that is available and we are just happy to get SOMEONE! Word of mouth is the best kind of advertising, both in selling your product and in finding good workers. Ask your employees (if you have some) to recommend people that they would feel comfortable working with for the jobs that need to be done. It is also important that you know your employees, whether they would give you a good recommendation or just a friend or someone they like.

Once again, we are back to the question of priorities for ourselves if we find that we can't afford more workers. We must find ways to make the best use of our time. Some things

that we have done that can really make a difference (and some of you may even have better ones) are:

- Harvesting: Using the best tool for cutting can make a big difference in the speed of cutting. There isn't any one tool that works for everyone. The size of the hands, coordination and ability to bend can make a big difference in what works best for each person. Some growers use hook knives, clippers, scissors or other sharp instruments. My workers and I have found that the wallpaper knife with replaceable blades is very efficient, easy to carry and cheap. Once the product is harvested, finding the best and quickest way to get them to the cooler is very important. The easiest answer to that last question is...

- Mass transportation. For flower farmers, this comes in numerous ways, from push/pull carts to wagons to powered vehicles (golf carts, tractors, pickups etc.) For us, it has been the golf cart with three 15-inch 'flower vases' (buckets) tied in where the golf clubs usually go. It would be nice if we had that area covered. This allows us to harvest quite a number of stems and quickly transport them to the cooler without having to spend a long time in the sun while we are filling a large number of 'vases'.

- Delivery to market. This is another area in which we can be more efficient with our time. We used to spend time pre-making many bouquets for the market and then hauling them to the location. The time spent making the bouquets and the space needed to transport them are both inefficient use of our time and space. It seems that a better use of our time is to make product at the market where customers enjoy seeing their bouquet being made (and even help in the designing) or they can also 'design' their own purchase to some extent. We still do make some bouquets because there are times that we have a customer who does not have the time to wait around, so it is a good idea to have some ready.

As you can probably tell already, there isn't always a consistent or ready answer to some of the questions raised while setting our priorities. We each have to recognize our strengths and weaknesses and use our time in the areas that we excel. Since most of us are small operations, we then have to hone our talents and abilities to be able to do the best that we can in each of the areas that call of our attention. Education is our best tool, from learning about the p's and q's of growing the flowers to learning about the equipment that we are using to even getting to know about the market that we are trying to enter, start or enlarge. We do have the first and most necessary qualities to do that: desire and passion. So let's go out and get 'em!



SOUTH-CENTRAL

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Well, thank goodness that winter is finally over. It was a weird season in most of the country, and our Region was no exception. It even snowed in Paradise (Paradise, Texas, that is). Amanda Muller (Paradise Specialty Flowers) sent in this photo of their one-foot-plus February snow.

The strange weather prompted many of our growers to think up some new ventures for spring. Amanda & Johann Muller, for example, are taking a plunge into herbs and edible flowers, encouraged by requests from some north Texas chefs. One crop of special interest—zucchini blossoms. Chefs like to deep fry or stuff them with cheese, chicken or other tasty treats. The Mullers also are extending their season by growing dahlias and sunflowers in hoopouses under grow lights and Asiatic lilies in crates year-round.

For Kim Martin and Laurie Bostic at Barking Cat Farm (Heath, Texas), the spring growing season was literally a washout. Constant rain, plus unusual heavy snowfall, kept the soil too wet to work from September 2009 through this February. Not letting bad weather get them down, Kim and Laurie shifted their focus to farm improvements—repairing fences, cutting invasive trees and now building high tunnels with the aid of their handy new pipe bender. With their new hoopouses, Kim and Laurie will be ready for the next wet season. Of course, that may never happen again in northeast Texas, but these growers will be set to extend their season, regardless of the weather.

2010 is the start of all things new for Linda McCall (Nature's Harmony Farm, Lone Grove, Oklahoma). Linda joined the ASCFG in 2004, and started preparing for a post-retirement career as a cut flower grower. She expected that new career was years away, but a series of unexpected events moved her retirement date up—to 2009. So Linda decided that the time had come enter the cut flower business. Like most of us starting out, Linda quickly realized that there is a big gulf between "head" knowledge and practice. She had attended many seminars, ASCFG conferences and meetings, collected lots of valuable information, and even grew up on a farm—but how to get started in this business was still a puzzle.



Lucky for Linda, her friend and fellow Oklahoman Vicki Stamback came to the rescue with an amazing mentoring program. She invited Linda to come to her farm once a week for 6 weeks. There Vicki provided hands-on instruction on many essentials: how to cut flowers; the proper stage for harvest; postharvest treatment; sources for seeds, bulbs, plugs and supplies; how to develop a field planting guide and planting calendar; proper spacing for plants; fertilizer guidelines; and much more. They walked Vicki's fields and greenhouses together and had many discussions about how Linda could best use her land for flower growing. Linda is indeed grateful and says "I owe any success I may have to Vicki." During her mentoring period, Linda also came to visit me for a few days. I gave her some more hands-on experience—I put her to work starting seed, transplanting snapdragon plugs and making bouquets for the farmers' market. I'm not sure she liked the bouquet part.

Linda came out of Vicki's program ready to go. She has her field planting guide completed, her seeds and bulbs ordered, her fields plowed, and her irrigation systems started. It's too bad every new grower can't go through Vicki's mentoring program, but I don't think Vicki has time for all of us. But wait!

That's what is going to happen at the Growers' School on Monday, November 8. This year's Growers' School will have two tracks: one for beginners and one for more experienced growers. The beginning School, held at Vicki's Bear Creek Farms in Stillwater, Oklahoma, will feature true hands-on experiences in areas such as seed germination, succession planting, equipment basics and record-keeping. The more advanced track, held in Tulsa, will

include intensive Quickbooks instruction and much more. So regardless of your level of experience, you will not want to miss the Growers' School this year.

Of course, you won't want to miss any of the 2010 ASCFG National Conference, November 8-11. It's going to be an amazing meeting, featuring sustainable/organic tracks, roundtable discussions, terrific speakers, and topped off with a tour of Bear Creek Farms. Vicki says she's been doing some new, exciting things at her farm this year, but she's not telling what they are: "Everyone will just have to attend the Conference and see for themselves." I want to see, don't you?



WEST

Christof Bernau

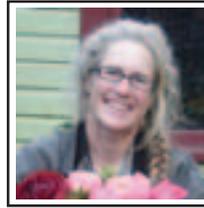
UCSC Center for Agroecology
christof@ucsc.edu

Greetings from the wet West. Not exactly the grand el Nino winter that forecasters had predicted, but it has been consistently wet since the new year. As of this writing, we are experiencing a normal Mediterranean climate wet season, with about 30" on rain along the coast, 40" just inland at 700' elevation and upwards of 60" near the coast range summits at roughly 1000' elevation. As always I am awed by the huge influence of orographics on local rainfall, despite such close proximity as the crow flies. In the high Sierras, snowfall totals are near normal for the year to date. Snow pack is a critical component of our dry season water supply, an ephemeral reservoir covering millions of acres of high alpine environment, released slowly as melt water over the course of spring and summer. Seven plus months every year with no rainfall requires massive water infrastructure to sustain life in the arid West, but without the natural "reservoir" provided by Sierra snow pack, agriculture, industry and human populations in California could never exist at the levels we know today.

Work on a combined West and Northwest Regional Meeting continues, tentatively planned for midsummer in Oregon for 2010 and here in Santa Cruz for 2011. Highlights include visits to area growers and round table discussion on crop production, and pest and disease issues for flower growers. Details to follow soon.

Perhaps as an ongoing sign of challenging economic times, I am almost exclusively receiving calls from brides wanting to purchase loose bunches of flowers from our farm, and then, with family and friends, do all of the arranging themselves. This seems to be an outgrowth of the growing do-it-yourself trend. For the most part, I love the idea of friends and family coming together to create such a vital and beautiful part of a wedding. From a producer and designer's perspective, however, I see this trend as a mixed blessing. On the downside, the do-it-yourself trend certainly limits our chance to market and profit from our creative design abilities. On the other hand, wedding work can be exacting and stressful, with a myriad of small but critical details that may not be our favorite part of being flower growers and designers.

While the typical do-it-yourself wedding invoice for flowers may be much smaller than a typical full-service wedding with all of the bells and whistles, the reduction in effort required and the consequent reduction in stress potential may make this an acceptable trend. Growers I have spoken to in the West have generally welcomed this transition and appreciated the additional time to focus on growing their crops and also to concentrate on other marketing outlets.



NORTHWEST

Diane Szukovathy

Jello Mold Farm
diane@jellomoldfarm.com

It's a good thing Dennis is not a jealous man because I've got the fast eye for just about every flower on this planet. From observation, that makes me a fairly normal flower farmer. Dennis is almost as bad as me, anyway. On our website we say we grow 150 varieties, but that's because neither one of us has the guts to do an actual count. It goes something like this: "Look at this beauty, can we grow it in our area? Little scissors symbol in the catalog? What's the vase life? Let's grow it and find out!" And in to the seed order it goes.

About one in ten of these floral puppies turns out to be a real winner. That's great except the recession keeps reminding us that we're running a business, not a research station, and in order to survive we need to meld some common sense into our passion. We need to at least know which ones are profitable.

This past winter I devoured Richard Wiswall's fabulous book, *The Organic Farmer's Business Handbook, A Complete Guide to Managing Finances, Crops and Staff—and Making a Profit*. He focuses on organic vegetable production, but the overall ideas are universal to farming and easily translate to any flower growing operation. Basically, it's about nickels and dimes. By minutely analyzing material and labor inputs for growing, harvesting and selling each crop and by using that information to make smart changes, a grower can choose to run a profitable operation, mother nature willing, of course.

Wiswall's book inspired me and even though it took a couple of weeks, I analyzed cost per stem for our farm to grow and harvest 70 different flower crops including annuals, perennials and woodies. We learned some surprising things about our own business: ultimately that each farm, no matter the size or diversity of operation needs to do its own fact checking. Climates vary, conditions vary, growing methods vary, markets vary, and everything is always changing.

Case in point for us: zinnias. The sacred Z. We read and believed them to be a no-brainer profit maker, especially the Benary's Giants. Last year we grew waist-high, gorgeous floriferous plants and the bunches looked stunning on our truck. But we grow fairly small quantities, do all of our seeding and transplanting by hand, and hydrating and then transferring to holding solution to preserve optimum vase life added precious labor time to harvesting cost. As well, our plants don't produce nearly the number of stems they would in another area of the country and public interest in zinnias here in the Seattle area seems to be waning.

Beauty was blinding us to the facts: it cost \$2.23 to produce a bunch we were selling for \$3.50 wholesale to florists and stores. And that's not counting overhead, sales and delivery costs. Selling 90-100 bunches a week, no way are zinnias profitable for our farm. Gulp. Nix the zinnias for 2010.

We learned what a lot of our experienced members already know, that labor costs are the most expensive part of running our farm. And no matter that we're owner-operators, our labor needs to be counted, too. Seed costs are relatively insignificant, even expensive seed, if it helps reduce labor inputs. Last year we trialed eight kinds of cockscomb celosia as a summer crop in our hoophouse. One was 'Bombay Purple', terribly expensive seed it seemed, except that we got almost 100% germination, amazing uniformity of stems with almost no fasciation and the crop matured three weeks sooner than the others. At 6-8 cents per seed, this year we'll be growing only the Bombays and shhh, don't tell the breeders but I can show you how the plants would be profitable even paying 20 cents per seed. The money is justified in harvest time alone—how much faster it goes if you don't have to hunt and pick the patch for uniform stems. Of course this example works for us because we're in a climate where celosia can't be successfully field grown and there's high demand for local product so we can ask a decent price.

We've built our reputation on having high quality and interesting offerings, always changing through the growing season. That's our passion. We want to keep it that way and we think it's good business for us, a small-scale, diversified operation. Not every crop has to be optimally profitable to stay on the roster. But we sure are asking a few more questions of a new plant we're considering growing. First off, who's going to buy it? Does it have universal appeal among our customer base? What's the season and how long is the harvest window? Can we sell it wholesale and retail? Does it have the bulk and 8-10 day vase life needed to go into our bouquets?

My winter work has shown that perennials and woody crops offer higher potential for profitability than most annuals on our farm, if we carefully choose the varieties. Again it mostly comes down to labor and it really can be something as simple as how many stems will it shoot in a season or how long does it take to strip the stems? We've learned to steer away from delicate stems with tiny flowers because our customers want to buy a substantial bunch of something, quite possibly an American syndrome.

Last year our most profitable perennial crops included *Phlox paniculata* varieties because they're bulky, have fragrant, old-fashioned cottage garden appeal, grow well in our climate, shoot out many stems and have a second bloom cycle; *Lysimachia clethroides* because of sheer number of stems produced, ease of

harvest and minimal amount of annual maintenance; and taller varieties of *Sedum* because of generous production of stems with minimal maintenance needs, universal appeal as bouquet structure, three-month harvest window and excellent keeping qualities.

Most grasses that agree with our climate have also proven themselves profitable, mainly because they don't need heavy inputs, grow like weeds, and are quick to harvest and bunch. Annual varieties do great for us, but perennials such as *Chasmanthium latifolium* and *Miscanthus* bring more profit because clumps increase each year, and time to maintain a row of perennial grasses costs us significantly less than starting over from seed each year.

As for my greatest weakness, the woodies, we're growing everything from roses to raspberry and chestnuts. Among them are both our most profitable and biggest sinkhole crops. The jury's still out on many of them because woody crops can take many years to establish. Ask me about the witch hazel in about ten more years, the lilacs in five. But we have figured out a few things. We don't know one farm that has filled its piggy bank from 'Cameo' quince. It looks great in catalogs, but in reality it flowers way down on the stems, goes into leaf as it flowers and has a five-day vase life. Those are not quality selling points.

Here are the tough questions we now put to woody crops: Will it grow well in our field? How many years until we can start harvesting? Who's going to buy it and will they still want it in ten years? What's the vase life?

And perhaps most important for profitability, how many stems per year per mature plant can we expect to harvest and how much time does it take to prep a stem? For example, rose hips have thorns and need leaves stripped so labor time harvesting is comparatively greater. Rose hips still make plenty of sense for us to grow though, because they meet a high demand in the market and we can charge a price that justifies the labor cost. Another plant group proving to

be a winner is just about any named variety of *Physocarpus opulifolius*. Grown mainly as a foliage crop, the ninebarks have easily a six-month harvest window, excellent vase life, abundant production and universal appeal with customers, so far.

Long and short is we're still just as distracted by beauty as we ever were, fall in love with every plant in the world, but we've learned to do the numbers. Ahh, the sweet fragrance of nickels and dimes!



Holding Steady, Ready to Rebound

Ira Silvergleit

In early January, SAF sent out the fourth-quarter installment of its Economic Outlook Survey to check the industry's pulse and ultimately answer the question: "Who's still standing?"

The response from suppliers provides an interesting perspective up and down the supply chain.

Wholesalers: Flat is Where it's At

Survey results indicated that wholesalers (both suppliers and importers) were evenly divided (44 percent each) over whether sales would increase or stay the same in the next six months. Only 7 percent predicted their sales would decline.

Some wholesalers admit that number might be good too good to be true. For example, if Wholesaler A has seen a 10 percent decrease in sales, said Scott Kitayama of Greenleaf Wholesale Florist in Pleasonton, Calif., but Wholesaler B has seen a 20 percent drop, Wholesaler A might decide his business is fine. After all, he's doing better than the next guy, right?

Shawn Seagroatt of Seagroatt Riccardi in Latham, New York joined Kitayama in taking the results with a grain of salt.

"Do I expect that (the vast majority) of wholesalers will experience either flat or increased sales over the next 12 months" he said. "No way! Some wholesalers are positioned well to benefit from changes in the competitive landscape, but most aren't."

For those "prepared wholesalers," Seagroatt expects an unprecedented and disproportionate revenue shift coming their way in the next few years.

Small victories do exist and deserve to be savored, said Kevin Priest, AAF, of Cleveland Plant & Flower Company in Parma, Ohio. He's especially encouraged by how his company has creatively

slimmed down to better survive the slump in sales.

"Sales are terrible, but profits, for the most part, are a little better than recent past years, because of cuts we made in expenses," Priest said. If the downward sales spiral doesn't level off, there won't be any fat left to cut. "Eventually the bottom line will be impossible to hold on to," he said. "Some fixed expenses cannot be cut."

The challenge is getting the recession-hit consumers back into the habit of buying flowers. Eric Levy of Hillcrest Garden Inc. in Paramus, New Jersey, cautioned that sales to mass marketers weakened only recently. "My fear is that some ultimate consumers may have only recently stopped purchasing flowers at grocery stores, 10 months or so after the recession actually started," Levy said.

Growers Grapple to Grow, Cheer Steady Sales

Like wholesalers, many growers in the industry have redefined success in the current economy.

"In June 2010, (if) we see we have met the prior year's sales, plus the inflation factor, then that is a success," said Troy Lucht of Plant Source International & Malmberg's in Rogers, Minnesota.

The survey found that more than half of the surveyed growers (56 percent) expected sales to remain about the same over the next six months. A third expected improvement. About 11 percent anticipated sales declines in the same period. As for the economy at large, about two-thirds of surveyed growers said they



expected the economy to remain steady.

Dave Self of Wyld West Annuals in Loxahatchee, Florida said he expects the economy to remain unchanged for the next two years. That sustained pressure to perform at peak levels with little waste may be too much for some, leaving new opportunities for well-positioned growers.

Buyers should be cautioned that companies are not going to "keep as much as they did in waiting, which will create a real supply and demand problem," Self said. "If (suppliers) can closely predict when the demand will begin and the supply will run out, and you are well stocked and ready to run, well, as they say on tv, you might be 'smarter than a fifth grader'"

A student of human nature, Self believes we're wired for a rebound. "(People) can only take being down for so long until they rise from the ashes and start rallying again," he said.

Ira Silvergleit is SAF's director of research and information.

Contact him at isilvergleit@safnow.org

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Answers

1. D. The first step in care and handling after you have received a shipment is to keep them refrigerated to reduce transpiration and respiration until you can process them.
2. No. It makes no difference to a flower stem's hydration performance if you cut it at an angle or straight across. The important thing to remember is to use a sharp, clean knife or bypass shears.
3. C. 75-85%. The other levels are either too low and will dry out the flowers, or they are too high and will create free-standing moisture which can promote botrytis.
4. False. Remove only the foliage that will be below the solution level in the storage container. Leaving foliage on the stem is beneficial for the hydration process. The foliage is also a natural filler for floral designs.
5. C. One pint.
6. D. Soak in a fresh flower food solution according to directions until the foam is fully saturated.
7. B. Clean your buckets after every use to prevent bacteria from plugging flower stems. Treat these containers as you would your dishes at home. Would you think about reusing a glass or plate without washing it?
8. A. The first step in care and handling is sourcing the freshest flowers you can.
9. C. The natural water loss by flowers and plants, generally through stomata.
10. C. Sugar (to provide energy), acid (to lower the pH) and stem unpluggers (to keep the flower's "plumbing" free flowing).

Grading Scale

- 10 correct answers: You are a flower care genius!
8 to 9 correct answers: Excellent—you're pretty bloomin' smart
6 to 7 correct answers: Your flower is fading, do some reading
5 or fewer correct answers: You're going to seed, better fertilize your brain with some flower care knowledge.

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W. Kurt Schroeder, AAF, AIFD, PFCI is president of WKS Associates, Inc., a floriculture consulting firm specializing in goal-oriented solutions. Contact him at wkschroeder@comcast.net



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The ASCFG Welcomes its Newest Members

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Edie Barker

Barker's Farm, Stratham, MA

Kristin Burrello

Muddy Feet Farm and Garden, Ashford, CT

Romayne Byrum

Batten Bay Farm, Carrollton, VA

Angie Clark

Tiawichi Creek Farms, Kilgore, TX

Christine Coker

Mississippi State Univ., Biloxi, MS

Tracy DiSabato-Aust

Sunbury, OH

Elizabeth Eggers

Wye Mountain Flowers and Berries, Roland, AR

J. Timothy Friary

Cape Cod Organic Farm, Barnstable, MA

Mel Green

Pruitt Flowers Inc., Pekin, IN

George Hart

Hart Hydroponics, Missoula, MT

Lyn Hicks

Harmony Hill Gardens, Sellersville, PA

Danny Jokelson

Heart of the Country Organic Flowers, Jacksonville, OR

Dusty Knight

Plantation Tree Company, Selma, AL

Patria Leath

Rockford, TN

Charis Lindrooth

Red Earth Farm, Orwigsburg, PA

Jerry Smith and Lisa Holderness

Deer Ridge Farm, Guilford, VT

Jack MacKenzie

Woodbine Mead, Springdale, AR

John Mapel

Mapel Plants, Grafton, MA

Sandra Mattie

Sunnyside Gardens, Fairbanks, AK

Michael Maurer

Stephen F. Austin University, Nacogdoches, TX

Malcolm McEwen

Dahlia Detour, Los Gatos, CA

Mark McVay

Cat Run Ranch Flower Farm, Newark, OH

Maria Nicolo

Gravity Hill Farm, Titusville, NJ

Rory O'Dwyer

Langwater Farm, Sharon, MA

Emily Claire Palmer

Bakehouse Farm, Milton, MA

Frances Pekala

Hadley, MA

Annie Perkinson

Flying Cloud Farm, Fairview, NC

Jeff Pruitt

Pruitt Flowers Inc., Pekin, IN

Deborah Schertz

Roaring Creek Farm, Franklin, TN

Lindsey Lusher Shute

Pistil Farm, Tivoli, NY

Lynda Simkins

Natick Community, Natick, MA

Anne Sprague

Edgewater Farm, Plainfield, NH

Jennifer Syme

Jen's Bouquets, Broad Brook, CT

Patty Taylor

Devon Point Farm, Woodstock, CT

Kathryn Thorne

Livingston, LA

Doug Trott

Prairie Garden Nursery, Starbuck, MN

Vicki Van Zee

Northampton, MA

Nancy Vekved

Sweet Peas and Carrot Cake, Bellingham, WA

Danny Watson

Dyersburg, TN

Joan Wright

Flower House Farm, Thomasville, NC

An ASCFG Regional Meeting is Coming to Your Area!

Mid-Atlantic - May 25

Longwood Gardens,
Kennett Square, Pennsylvania

Northwest - June 28

Charles Little & Co., Eugene, Oregon

Northeast - July 19-20

Cornell University and Ithaca-area farms

Thanks for the Good Word!

New members named you as the
reason they joined the ASCFG.

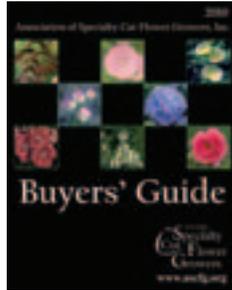
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Betsy Hitt
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Nancy Kapelak
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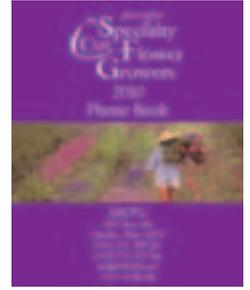


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and Jeannine Bogard. It's easy
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events and news.

Watch Your Mailbox!



The new ASCFG Buyers' Guide
and the 2010 Phone Book have
been mailed together to all
ASCFG members.



Dave Dowling ASCFG Scholarship Awarded to Arizona Student



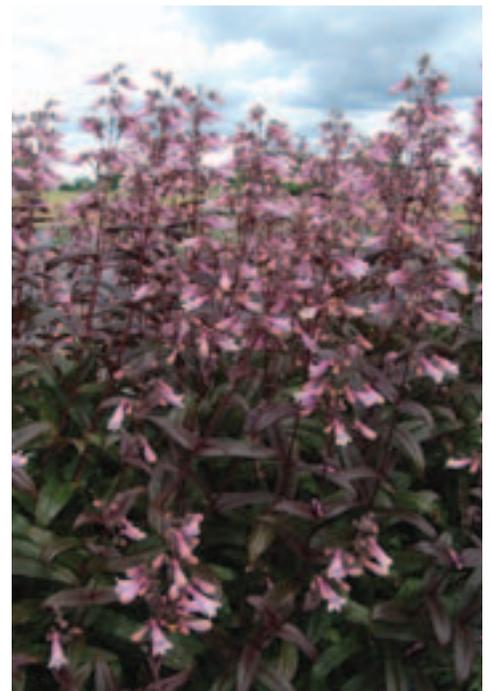
The ASCFG Scholarship
Committee recently commended a
floriculture student for her academic
work, life experience and career goal.

Kalea Taylor will be a plant
science and agriculture education
major at the University of Arizona
this fall. She plans to continue her
graduate education at Texas A&M
in horticulture with emphasis in
floriculture.

Kalea has been involved with
Future Farmers of America for
several years, and has experience in
floral design and greenhouse work.
The Committee found that her strong
passion for floriculture makes her
well qualified for this award.

Errata

A photo on page 49 of the January
2010 issue of *The Cut Flower
Quarterly* was mislabeled as
Penstemon 'Dark Towers'. A
correct photo appears here. The
ASCFG regrets the error. These
photos are credited to Erin Regan:
snapdragon 'Potomac Crimson',
basil 'Cardinal', dianthus
'Fandango Purple Picotee',
monarda 'Raspberry Wine',
penstemon 'Sunburst Amethyst'.



Research is the lifeblood of any industry. If not for horticulture research, there would be no floral preservatives, there would be no summer-grown flowers, no improvements in cut flower cultivars, and there would be no Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers. To suggest research be a low priority is to suggest that the specialty cut flower industry cannot get any better.

Allan Armitage, University of Georgia



We do the research so you don't have to. While you need to stay ahead of your competition, on-farm research takes time and money and distracts you from running your business. Researchers can test the latest in cultivars, production and postharvest handling techniques, and give you the synopsis of what to try. Help us help you make your business more profitable.

John Dole, North Carolina State University



The Research Foundation is invaluable in providing funding to expand practical research on new methods to combat insect and diseases that reduce the value of specialty cut flowers. The results of these funded field research projects enables university extension researchers to help cut flower growers reduce losses to devastating diseases and insects. There will always be new invasive insects and diseases that will impair profitability in specialty cut flowers, and we must continue the efforts to find new and better control methods.

Stanton Gill, University of Maryland



Working on cut flower species that are not the roses, carnations and mums of world trade can be quite a challenge. There are many plant species, each with specific spacing, timing, light, water and fertilizer requirements, which in many cases have not been thoroughly explored. When new growing techniques come along like the use of high tunnels, the time of planting can change, and the temperatures to which the crops are exposed are different. The ASCFG Research Foundation is key in providing funding that encourages solutions to these challenges.



Chris Wien, Cornell University

**Donate to the ASCFG Research Foundation
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March 2010

Week	Sun day	Mon day	Tue day	Wednes day	Thurs day	Fri day	Satur day
9	ORDER:						
10	Dahlias						
11	Lilies						
12	Gladioli						
13	Callas						
13	Crocossia						

April 2010

Week	Sun day	Mon day	Tue day	Wednes day	Thurs day	Fri day	Satur day
13							
14							
15							
16							
17							

May 2010

Week	Sun day	Mon day	Tue day	Wednes day	Thurs day	Fri day	Satur day
18							
19							
20							
21							
22							

June 2010

Week	Sun day	Mon day	Tue day	Wednes day	Thurs day	Fri day	Satur day
22							
23							
24							
25							
26							

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From the DIRECTOR

Judy Laushman

WordPerfect rules! Everyone should use FileMaker Pro for database management. PageMaker is the only way to lay out magazines.

What kind of technologically-challenged dinosaur makes claims like that? Who would so stubbornly cling to such old-style programs?

Me. People either laugh at or pity me, but I'm one of those who finds a system that works, and sticks to it. I can produce a document in WordPerfect ten times faster than I can in Word. My FileMaker program was designed specifically for me, and can be modified as my needs change.

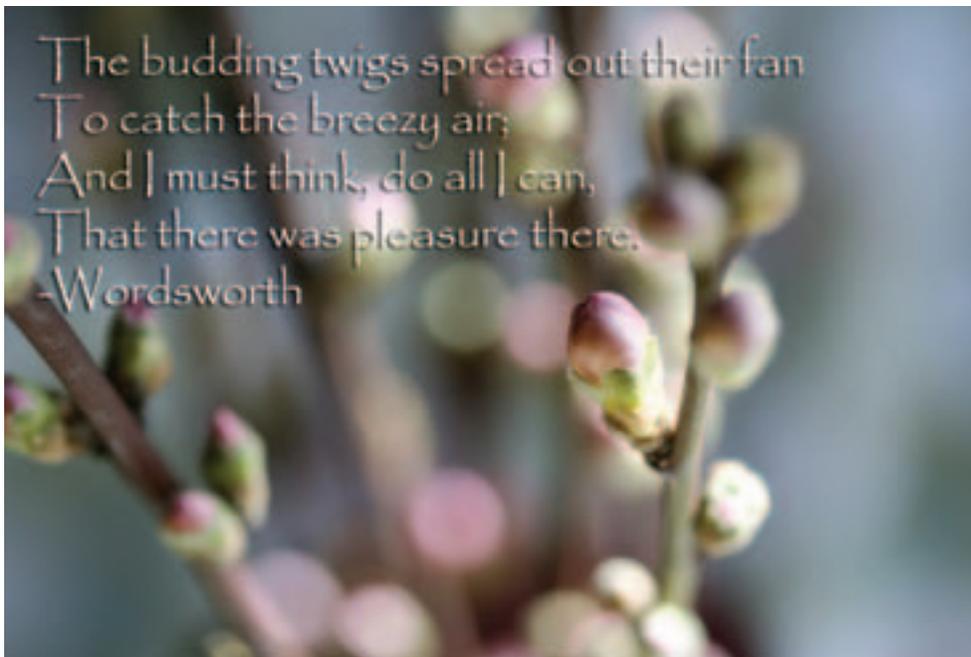
And my needs *are* changing, as are yours and the Association's. Some of us had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the electronic world, but once we got there, we found it to be pretty amazing.

The ASCFG Bulletin Board is one of our most popular member benefits; the archives go back almost ten years, and each week brings new conversations. It's easy to communicate with all our members simultaneously using our "Short Cuts" e-newsletter. And now that the ASCFG has its own Facebook page, even more growers can link directly to each other's farm sites, and post events, markets and product highlights.

Plans are in the works here for other projects like webinars and online videos, services which will educate members quickly and easily. These methods of communication won't replace the invaluable face-to-face interaction enjoyed at Regional Meetings and National Conferences, but will supplement it, and broaden the topics that the organization can share.

At the same time, we're looking back through the archives of *The Cut Flower Quarterly* and finding some still-pertinent information. Though markets change and trends evolve (depending on how you feel about dyed sunflowers), specialty cut flower growers will always be looking for something new and unusual to add to their crop list. For this issue, I pulled out one of Janet Foss's "Lemons and Lemonade" article from 2001. This column, originated by Paul Sansone, examined plants that may have seemed likely candidates for cut flowers, but sometimes turned out not to be, as well as those that most growers might not have given a second look and ended up being bestsellers. It's definitely worth a second look.

It's important that we don't forget what we learned long ago, and embrace new methods at the same time. And yes, I wrote this column in WordPerfect.



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