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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

Inside this Issue

From the President.....	3
Flowers are Good For You.....	4
Culture Profile.....	6
Small Things Considered.....	10
Cornell-copia.....	12
IPM Update.....	14
Research Update.....	16
Grower Profile.....	20
Back to Basics.....	24
Regional Reports.....	25
Classifieds.....	31
Book Reviews.....	32
20th Anniversary.....	34
ASCFG News.....	37
National Conference Preview..	41
National Conference Program..	42
From the Director.....	46

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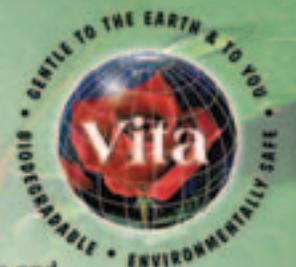
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FROM *the President*

Dave Dowling

There are three things I want cover in my column this time:

Getting Prepared - Being Sustainable - Learning New Stuff

Be prepared for things that you think would never happen, because they will happen. Have a contingency plan for when your new seasonal employees decide they want to get an easy job at the mall and just don't show up for work one day. Do you have family, friends or even former employees you could call on in a pinch? How fast can you hire replacement workers? If no one shows up to water the new seedlings, how will you manage?

Now is the time to plan for that summer storm that knocks out the power for two or three days when the temperature is in the 90s and your electric well pump won't work, and your greenhouse fans are quiet. Buy that generator *now* so that you won't be looking at empty store shelves the day of the big storm. And don't forget to keep the fuel tank filled and an extra can of gas, too. If you have greenhouses you heat in the winter, a generator is just as, if not more important for you. One night without electricity can freeze everything in a greenhouse in a matter of hours.

If you haven't looked at the *Sustainability Standards* yet, don't complain when you have to throw out all your black buckets and buy new "white or light colored buckets" if you want to call your farm sustainable. Yes, that is just one item in the proposed Sustainable Standards—*no black buckets*. (Talk about sustainable - think of all those black buckets overflowing the landfills.) If you have any interest in labeling your farm "sustainable" you need to read the Draft of the Sustainable Agriculture Practice Standards at www.ofa.org/standards. You can even get on the development committee or subcommittees and help shape this into something *you* want, not something dreamed up by some

organization that has never grown a cut flower before.

Everyone needs to learn *new stuff*: even old dogs and old cut flower growers could use a new trick every once in a while. One of the best places to learn new things about this business is from other businesses like yours. I often wonder where I would be if I wasn't involved with the ASCFG. I doubt I would be growing 40,000 lilies in crates each year. (With help of course!) I first saw crates of lilies at the San Diego Conference in 2001. I went home and within a couple weeks planted my first batch of crate lilies and have never looked back. At a Regional Meeting at Mimó Davis' in 2002 I first saw lisianthus in a tunnel and greenhouse. Wow! They weren't anything like what I had seen grown out in the field. All my lisianthus is grown in a tunnel or greenhouse now. In 2002 at the Madison Conference I saw how shade cloth could keep every PG hydrangea bloom from getting sunburned. It took a couple years to get the shade cloth installed here, but what a difference it made.

In 2004 I didn't get to see first-hand what happens when a hurricane runs right through your farm. But that's what happened to one of the tour sites scheduled for the Orlando Conference. I had seen Butch Coward's very productive farm the year before at the Southeast Regional Meeting. His loss pushed me to get enough insurance coverage for my greenhouses and business to cover me if such a disaster struck. (That's part of getting *prepared* discussed above.) In 2005 I learned about gerberas on the Conference tour to Hendrick's Flowers. Those plants are productive! I could go on, but you probably get my point. You'll learn something valuable at just about every ASCFG event you attend. Don't miss your learning opportunity in Portland or at the Regional Meetings scheduled this summer. It's worth the trip. Honest.

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Carol Caggiano AIFD, PFCI

We are all about wellness. Diet and exercise are foremost in our minds for good health and well being. Regular doctor visits, screenings and checkups are marked on our calendars. We talk about stress and reducing stress as a key to good health both physically and mentally. Our busy lives make these goals challenging, but we keep trying. Yoga, Pilates, spinning, South Beach, Atkins and many more, are all activities relevant in the 21st century vocabulary. But there is one thing missing that is fun, beautiful, easy to access and definitely good for you and that is flowers.

Everyone loves flowers and always has, so what is so special now? They make great presents for birthdays and anniversaries and are especially helpful if one is in the doghouse, a sure method to get out. A wedding or party isn't quite right without flowers. But again, what does this have to do with wellness?



Have you ever noticed that you smile when you see flowers? That “feel good” aura that surrounds you when flowers are given to you or are even just near by? The Society of American Florists did notice and decided to invest in research to prove that flowers are an integral part of our lives and do make us happy. The results from the research proved that flowers are good for us and do make a difference in our quality of life.

As flower growers you know flowers make *you* happy. That's why you are a grower, right? Or at least part of the reason. But often it is forgotten that the flowers themselves can make a huge difference in the lives of the people who buy

them. Let's take a look at the findings from the research. Many of you have heard of some of this research and are familiar with it, but when you see it all together it reminds us that flowers really *are* good for us.

Flowers Make Us Happy

The first study was done by Dr. Jeanette Haviland-Jones of Rutgers University in New Jersey. Her challenge was to study the effect of flowers on human emotion and well-being. The research proved that flowers increase happiness and life satisfaction, and lead to increased contact with family and friends. Specifically, study participants expressed “true” or “delighted” smiles upon receiving flowers. They placed the flowers in areas of their homes that were open to visitors, suggesting that the flowers made the space more welcoming. Flowers were found to have long-term positive effects on moods. Study recipients reported feeling less depressed, anxious or agitated after having received flowers, and demonstrated a higher sense of enjoyment and life.

Seniors Are Less Depressed and More Social

The next exploration of flowers and their effects was done again with Dr. Haviland-Jones and Rutgers. This time the study was done with senior citizens. Do flowers make a difference as we age? “Happier people live longer, healthier lives and are more open to change. Our research shows that small doses of



nature, like flowers, can do a world of wonder as we age.” said Dr. Haviland-Jones. The study demonstrated that flowers eased depression, inspired social networking and refreshed memory for seniors.

Creativity Expands in the Workplace

How about the workplace? Could flowers make a difference in how we do our jobs? Dr. Roger Ulrich from Texas A&M University found that flowers and plants do inspire better business ideas. Problem solving, idea generation and creative performance improved substantially in workplace environments that included flowers and plants. “Productivity in the form of innovation and creative problem solving can mean the difference between mild and great success.” said Dr. Ulrich. As a result, flowers and plants are a natural addition to any work environment.

Home is Where the “Stress Relief” Is

To me, one of the most important of the studies involved flowers at home. Could the mere presence of flowers in the home change people’s mood or state of mind? Dr. Nancy Etcoff of Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School decided to find out. Her research concluded that people felt more compassionate towards others, had less worry and anxiety, and felt less depressed when fresh cut flowers were present in the home. The study proved that living with flowers could provide a boost of energy, happiness and even a carryover impact on our mood at work.

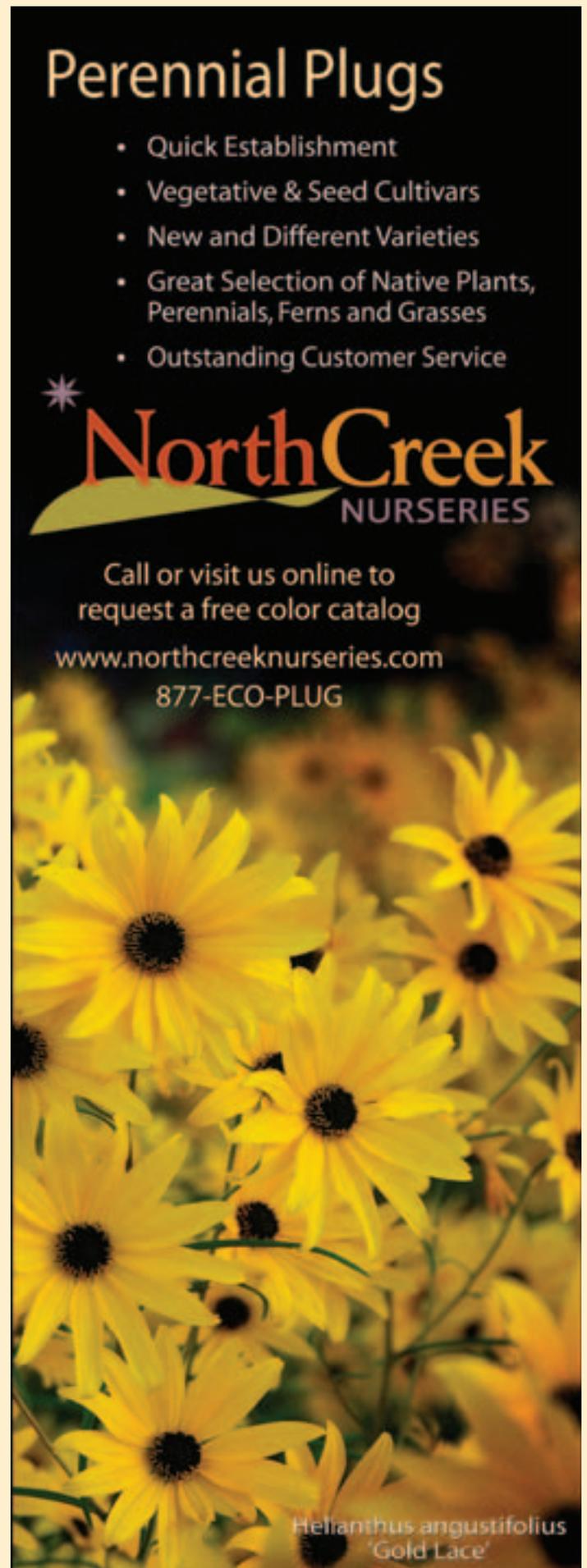
Giving Flowers Makes You Happy Too

Dr. Haviland-Jones most recently studied the act of giving flowers. Her findings showed that people who gave flowers were perceived as happy, achieving, strong, capable and courageous. People remember when they are given flowers and will continue to feel grateful long after the gift was received. Those who give flowers give the impression that they can effectively express their feelings and take the time to understand the feelings of others. Flowers activate a positive emotional response from people and put a smile on their faces. What could be better than making someone happy? It certainly makes the giver content and happy in return.

Flowers make us smile. They reduce stress by surrounding us with a feeling of contentment and well-being. Most of us strive to be healthier and live a longer, more productive and happy life. By incorporating flowers in our lives we can easily help accomplish these goals. Keep on with the exercise, diet and good health habits but don’t forget the flowers!

For more information visit: www.aboutflowers.com

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CULTURE Profile

Gary Pellett

Commercial Outdoor Cut Flower Roses: A Brief Introduction, Part 1 of 2

Commercial demand for the elegant, old-fashioned cut roses that can only come from outdoor grown roses is increasing. The consumer is looking for sources of fresh, locally-grown products. Because the cultivation success is dependent on local climate, this short introduction is not able to consider all aspects of cultivation in detail. Please contact Newflora/Kordes with any additional questions.

Types of Plants Available

Plants of varieties suitable for commercial outdoor forcing are offered as one and two years budded rose (grafted) bushes. Understocks serve to increase vigor and stem length of cut stems for most varieties, and typically adapt better to the various soil conditions encountered throughout North America. The most commonly used understocks in North America are Dr. Huey, *Rosa manetti*, and *R. multiflora*. Orders should be placed early to allow plant producers the opportunity to obtain budding eyes of the desired varieties.

Varieties for Culture

The selection criteria for varieties for commercial outdoor culture differ substantially from those for regular garden use. Typically, new varieties are trialed in commercial culture alongside existing varieties for characteristics such as vigor, productivity, disease susceptibility, stem length, market demand, and postharvest performance. The postharvest performance is one of the most important factors, in that the cut flowers must take up water, have acceptable vase life, and open in a pleasing manner. Additionally, leading hybridizers are developing varieties for production of rose hips, which receive excellent prices in the market and help to extend the shipping season into the late fall. It is suggested that growers contemplating outdoor cut rose production contact wholesale rose plant suppliers for information on their breeding programs.

Soil Preparation and Planting

A soil test should be done on the area to be planted. Fertilizers and amendments should be adjusted to the results. Proper soil preparation generally includes:

- an initial deep cultivation of the production area.
- incorporation of organic matter (depending on the soil and drainage of the site). Some commonly used organic amendments include compost, leaf mold, aged bark, aged sawdust, peat, composted rice hulls, sugar cane bagasse, etc.
- adjusting the soil pH to the ideal range of 6.2 – 6.5. For liming, dolomitic lime is generally preferred (soil test is recommended).

Row spacing and planting density often depend on the size of the grower's equipment. Consideration should be given to the width of the equipment and to final size and habit of the rose bushes when fixing the distance between the rows. Often, the row layout resembles row widths used in vineyards; however, spacing in the row is much denser so that rows in an established plantation look



like hedges. Often, growers plant some type of turf between rows for weed and erosion control, and to aid in access to the field for cultural and harvest activities.

To maximize production per plant and improve access to the plants for harvest and cultural activities as well as air circulation, row spacing has been increased by growers to ranges of 60–100 in. (150 to 260 cm) between rows. Planting in beds or using double row planting systems are now generally recommended only for areas of low humidity and rainfall, where disease pressure is lower. The spacing varies from 12 to 24 inches (30 to 60 cm) between plants in the row, yielding a hedge-like plantation. For long-term weed control, plants can be planted through landscape cloth. If the production is in an area where supplemental irrigation is required, a drip line can be placed next to the row of plants. Depending on design, emitters of ½ to 2 gph (2-8 lph) are often utilized.

Planting

Ideally, plants are planted from late winter to early spring. Upon receipt of dormant plants, a grower should open the cartons, visually inspect the bushes, and spray water over them to insure that they are properly hydrated. Dormant plants may be stored up to several weeks at temperatures of 35–45F (2-4C),

provided that the plants have not begun to force. Do not store rose bushes where there may be an ethylene source, as ethylene rates higher than 1 ppm are detrimental. Before planting, the roots should be trimmed slightly. Any weak, dry, or thin canes or stems should be removed from the bushes prior to planting. It is best to prune the canes to a length of approximately 8 inches (20 cm) above the bud union before planting. For best success, the bushes should be soaked in water overnight to maximize hydration.

Plants should be planted with the bud union at or near the soil line (with plants on *R. multiflora* understock, the bud union should be buried 1-1½ inches [(3-4 cm)]. This most generally requires digging an individual hole for each plant. A small amount (less than ¼ cup) of a balanced fertilizer (ideally, slow release) should be mixed with the soil used to fill back in around the plant. When starting dormant rose bushes, the objective is to allow the plant to create roots prior to shoot and foliage development. To this end, the newly planted canes and plants should be covered with mounds of mulch, bark, rice hulls, or straw to insure that the canes are protected from frost and/or sunny or drying conditions. The organic matter should be piled high enough to cover the complete cane, with only the tip of the cane showing. A basin should be formed with soil around individual plants in order to insure that water doesn't run off. The basins should be filled once or twice immediately following planting. Thereafter, the objective is to water lightly to moisten the organic matter and the canes.

Caring for Young Plants

Inspect the new planting frequently, to be sure that new white roots are being produced in conjunction with the new shoot growth. Young plants need time to develop prior to being put into production. After risk of frost has passed and the shoots and roots are developing, the organic matter can be pushed back away from the plants to serve as mulch.

As the case with most things in life, there are several ways to build up plants for production. The objective is to build a 'chassis' of canes/lower branches that will serve as the base for future production. One way is to 'pinch' each developing shoot when the buds have developed to a diameter of approximately a quarter inch (4-5 mm, roughly pea-size). The pinch is accomplished by cutting back the stem to above the second 5-leaflet leaf (which translates roughly to removing to the upper half of the stem). Generally, 1-year-old bushes are pinched twice prior to allowing some canes to come to flower.



Fertilization and Irrigation Programs

Fertilizer applications should be based on soil analysis from a company with experience in rose production. The analysis should include pH, soil conductivity (E.C.), N, P, K, Mg, and Ca. The applications of nitrogen should be divided over the growing season. The first application should be given in spring where growing has commenced and the second application should be given after the first flush. In northern growing areas, the latest applications of N should be during the second half of July. The last nitrogen application should also contain high K content in order to balance the vegetative growth prior to the winter.

In locations where irrigation is required, the best system is drip because it does not wet the foliage and flowers. Roses respond well to fertilizer injected into the irrigation water.



Plant Protection

Most everyone, including our insect and fungal friends, loves roses. Depending on the local climate, insect and disease pressure can vary significantly. The diseases that are most commonly encountered in outdoor production are:

- black spot (*Diplocarpon rosae*)
- botrytis (*Botrytis cinerea*)
- downy mildew (*Peronospora sparsa*)
- powdery mildew (*Sphaerotheca pannosa* var. *rosae*)

Insects and pests most commonly encountered in outdoor production are:

- aphids in the spring, most typical is the green peach aphid
- western flower thrip
- spider mites towards the end of the season

One suggestion for growers new to roses is to research cultural methods used by local garden rose aficionados. Members of the American Rose Society (www.ars.org) are often great sources of cultural information for local weather and soil conditions.

Harvest

The recommended cutting height for outdoor cuts is above the 2nd to the 4th eyes above the point of the shoot initial. Any strong basal shoots should be cut back to approximately half their height, to allow multiple flower shoots to develop from the upper nodes.

The best cutting stage depends on the flower size, flower variety, time of year, and weather conditions. Larger-flowered varieties should be cut when the outer petals have begun to open. During cooler weather conditions the flower buds should be allowed to develop further prior to cutting. To maximize postharvest quality, the freshly cut stems should put into a conditioning solution and held at 35-40F (2-4C) for a minimum of 6 hours before distribution.

Summary

The ability to deliver cut stems of unique flower varieties in water, for a 'fresh from the garden' look, gives local growers a great advantage in the market. There is a wealth of information about growing roses available from a number of sources, including the internet. However, anyone contemplating the cultivation of outdoor cut roses should understand that their culture can be quite intensive, depending on the season. The grower should be able to organize and execute cultural activities, such as pruning, mulching, spraying, cultivation, and harvesting. However, once a plantation is established, it can produce top quality flowers year in and out for 8 to 10 years or more, with reasonable care. The varieties selected specifically for outdoor cut flower and cut rose hip production offer unique products on the market.

Gary Pellett is agent for Kordes™ Roses from Newflora LLC.
Contact him at gpellett@newflora.com

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SMALL Things Considered

Gay Smith

Wag More, Bark Less

A lush display of blooming baskets can stimulate impulse purchases among gardeners in much the same way Hershey bars at checkout lines stimulate a must-have response in children (or in anyone, for that matter). Is the same true of cut flower displays? Do they push the needle on the Richter scale of impulse sales? Yes and no.

Our industry has spent considerable time, money and research working to nudge flowers out of the rut of a once or twice a year gift item into an *everyday* purchase category. The results have been somewhat successful, but opportunity continues to knock. Changing, even shifting, a consumer purchasing paradigm is slow going and requires input (and integrity) at every level within the industry. Stimulating everyday sales means the product must trigger a positive response in the consumer's head motivating him to buy. What reason do you give your customers to buy?

Again with the "Lifestyle"

Success in shifting a paradigm requires redirecting customer expectations and then satisfying those expectations. In a recent *GrowerTalks* article, Kerry Herndon talks about aspirations, and quotes Charles Revson, the founder of Revlon, "*In the factory we make cosmetics; in the store we sell hope.*" Kerry asks the reader, "Hope for what? A better quality of life, whatever that means to the buyer."

To communicate the connection between floral products and a better quality of life, the Society of American Florists (SAF) has sponsored several

research projects at Harvard and Rutgers Universities providing evidence that plants and flowers do indeed improve the quality of life. The studies proved that flowers and plants improve workplace productivity, act as air fresheners, strengthen feelings of compassion and decrease anxiety and worry. Popular trends including lifestyle, outdoor living and sustainability associate flowers and plants with quality of life, too. No one will deny that cut flowers and plants are distinctively "green".

So why then, with so many positive attributes going for us, do we (and those we sell to) remain stuck in thinking of our

Telling customers that lilies will outlast iris in a mixed bouquet is an easy way to develop customer trust and avoid dissatisfaction. With that kernel of information, customers are now waiting to see how long the lilies last rather than feeling disappointed that the iris withered first.

products as commodities? The disadvantage of a commodity mind-set is that it generates a price race for the bottom. To break out of this mentality, Mr. Herndon suggests jazzing up packaging and presentation. The product itself may be beautiful, but dirty buckets or pots are not. Flower and plant aesthetics may drive impulse sales, but savvy marketers take it one step farther and smarten the entire package.

Following the mantra of all things *lifestyle*, consumers want products that provide an experience, not just a register ring.

Red Zinger or Sleepy Time?

What product do you consider a commodity? Is there any panache to its presentation? Lipton black tea is a good

example: tea bags in paper wrappers. Now think Celestial Seasonings black tea: bags wrapped in foil packets (*freshness*) with a colorful picture of an English cottage and garden (*commune with nature*). The packaging identifies where in England the blend originates, Devonshire, (*vicarious travel experience*), has brewing directions (*get most out of product*) and a wise saying from William Wordsworth (*makes consumer feel literate*). All created to enhance the experience of enjoying a cup of tea.

Developing the experience aspect provides leverage to fight against attitudes that commodity products are synonymous with minimum acceptable quality.

Commodities lack uniqueness. Establishing uniqueness may be as simple as identifying the flower variety on the sleeve or sales placard. Name your bouquets using pop cultural connections or humorous monikers. Lean on titles that baby boomers relate to, like Moody Blues or Mellow Yellows. Make sure your company name (and logo) is apparent on everything. It teaches customers to ask for your product by name.

When selling to wholesalers, provide common names as well as Latin nomenclature. Phone sales are far more dominant than walk-ins at wholesale level, and people don't sell it (or buy it) if they can't call it by name. "Limited" is another way to denote uniqueness. It also generates excitement and provides a grand opportunity for taking pre-orders for the following week's deliveries.



Educated Customers May Buy More Flowers

Another way to break out of commodity mentality is to provide information about the vase longevity and reliability of various blooms. People want and respect an honest appraisal of the longevity of the product. Telling customers that lilies will outlast iris in a mixed bouquet is an easy way to develop customer trust and avoid dissatisfaction. With that kernel of information, customers are now waiting to see how long the lilies last rather than feeling disappointed that the iris withered first.

Describe the postharvest treatments used to ensure top quality. Properly treated products demand more money than bunches placed in tap water. Postharvest procedures maximize shelf life and reduce the amount of dumped product. Shrink percentage is an important number on which buyers are evaluated. Wholesale buyers expect ethylene-sensitive delphiniums to be treated with STS in postharvest, and wilt-sensitive hydrangeas to be hydrated in a commercial hydration solution rather than tap water.

Don't get me wrong, I don't think specialty cut flower growers view their products as commodity items, but the people to whom you sell may, and by doing so, feel justified to ask for ever-lower pricing. Arm your sales staff with the tools needed to break away from a boorish commodity profile.



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How do you go about distinguishing your products? Grade flowers so buyers know they can rely on receiving consistent bunch size and quality every time they buy. Another deal-maker is offering information on handling techniques that maximize vase performance. Never assume customers know how to handle floral products. Adding aspirin or vodka to the vase may sound cute, but it's not

nearly as effective as a commercial flower food. Know the basics of correct handling, because two days can make the difference between a delighted customer or one who sees flowers as a commodity item not worth the money.

Gay Smith is the Technical Consulting Manager for Chrysal USA.

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Pinching Sunflowers

Many sunflower varieties we use for cut flowers produce one flower and no branches. And since those flowers tend to be larger than most consumers want, we have learned to crowd them in the field to keep them small. What if we pinch the plants early, forcing them to branch? Would that increase yield, reduce flower size, and reduce the need to sow as many seeds? Yes, but it depends. In 2006, we pinched ‘Procut Orange’ and ‘Sunrich Orange’ sunflowers grown at 9 x 9 in. spacing in a 4-foot bed, and found that while we increased stem yield from 1 to 4 per plant, the flowers were too small to be attractive. So in 2007 we varied the plant spacing to see if a wider spacing, combined with pinching, would produce good yields of high quality flowers.

As in previous years, we compared two varieties: ‘Procut Orange’ and ‘Sunrich Orange.’ Spacing treatments included: 9 x 9 in. with 4 rows per bed, and 12 x 12 in. with 3 rows per bed. Pinching treatments were an unpinched control and a soft pinch leaving 4 nodes. Seeds were sown on June 1, and transplanted on June 20. Plants were pinched on July 2. Flowers were harvested, and flower diameter measured, when the petals were at right angles to the flower disk.

Pinching increased yield of stems from 1 to 3.6 per plant, but delayed flowering by 6 days (Table 1). Stem length of branches harvested was reduced by nearly 50%, but stems were still of adequate length. The 39% reduction in flower diameter could constrain sales to some customers, however, especially those at farmers’ markets. Smaller flowers are more readily accepted by florists because they are easier to work with in small arrangements. By increasing the spacing from 9 x 9 in. to

12 x 12 in., the flower diameter of the pinched plants increased from 2.1 to 2.4 in., perhaps sufficient enough to increase marketability (Table 1).

‘Procut Orange’ flowered 9 days earlier than ‘Sunrich Orange’ in this trial, and was shorter (Table 2). When pinched, the former produced significantly more basal branches. This may have been due to a lower incidence of a lower leaf necrosis that severely affected ‘Sunrich Orange’ in this trial (Fig. 1). Since removal of the stem tip deprived it for a time of new leaves, the state of health of the old leaves could have adversely affected the production of branches.



Figure 1. ‘Sunrich Orange’ pinched at node 4, and showing a lower leaf necrosis that was much less prevalent in Procut Orange.

Table 1. Effect of spacing and pinching of sunflowers on stem yield, earliness of flowering, stem length and size of flower in a field experiment on ‘Procut Orange’ and ‘Sunrich Orange’ sunflower.

Treatments	Stems/plant (No.)	Days to first flower from sowing	Stem length (in.)	Flower diameter (in.)
Pinching: None	1.0	64	47	3.6
Pinched	3.6	70	26	2.3
Statistical significance	***	***	***	***
9 x 9, none	1.0	65	48	3.4
9 x 9, pinched	3.3	71	23	2.1
12 x 12, none	1.0	64	46	3.8
12 x 12, pinched	3.8	69	28	2.4
Interaction significance	*	ns	**	ns

When yields are calculated on an area basis, assuming that beds are spaced 6 ft apart, pinched 'Procut Orange' at the closer spacing is nearly 4 times as productive as either variety that has not been pinched at that spacing (Table 3). Pinched 'Procut Orange' plants grown at the wider spacing were 28% more productive than pinched 'Sunrich Orange' plants at the narrow spacing. This indicates that choice of variety and spacing can result in considerable increases in sunflower productivity through the use of pinching.

Table 2. The influence of variety and pinching, and their interaction, on yield and components in the sunflower pinching experiment.

Treatments	Stems/plant (No.)	Days to first flower from sowing	Stem length (in.)	Flower diameter (in.)
Procut Orange	2.6	63	33	2.8
Sunrich Orange	1.9	72	40	3.1
Statistical significance	*	**	**	ns
Procut control	1.0	61	43	3.5
Procut pinched	4.3	65	23	2.1
Sunrich control	1.0	68	51	3.7
Sunrich pinched	2.8	75	28	2.4
Interaction significance	***	ns	ns	ns

Table 3. Stem numbers harvested per 100 ft. of row, for the two sunflower varieties when grown at two spacings in the bed, and either pinched or not pinched.

Variety	9 x 9 in. spacing		12 x 12 in. spacing	
	Control	Pinched	Control	Pinched
Procut Orange	533	2,133	400	1,840
Sunrich Orange	533	1,332	400	1,240

Chris Wien is Professor of Horticulture at Cornell University. The excellent assistance of Liza White, supervisor, and assistants Martha Gioumousis, Teddy Bucien and Liz Stuprich is gratefully acknowledged. Many thanks to Johnny's and SeedSense seed companies for donation of the seeds used in this trial.

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IPM Update

Stanton Gill

Wet, Wet, Wet: Enough with the Rain!

My grandfather was a Pennsylvania farmer, and when I was a child he told me that farmers were not happy unless they were complaining about the weather. It gave them something to discuss in a loud manner, argue over, and complain about. Rarely would two farmers agree that the weather was perfect.

Last year on the East Coast, from the northern Maryland border to Georgia in the south, we suffered through one of the worst droughts we have seen for 60 years. It basically did not rain from mid-March until the end of October. Wise cut flower growers who had installed trickle irrigation systems patted themselves on the back and enjoyed some of the best quality cut flowers I had seen in a long time. Foliar diseases on cut flowers were rather rare in our area in 2007. The pathologists were glum but everyone else was happy.

It was sunny southern California weather just about every day, with no canceled farm markets and a great growing year if you had a water source. We almost got tired of all of the sunny weather with same bright clear skies every day.

A Wet Start to the Season

This year it is the complete opposite. We just fell short of a record set in 1988 for the greatest amount of rainfall in May. It has been cooler than normal with frequent storms. All of my pathology friends are gleeful this year. Pathologists tend to be weird in this manner but somehow endearing. Each time another case of downy mildew shows up on some poor grower's plants brought to our Research and Education Center the pathologists say things like "Diseases rule in 2008!"

Not only downy mildew is prevalent in Maryland this spring, but dozens of leaf spot disease are showing up on cut flower annuals, perennials and even woody cut stems. We are seeing *Botrytis* and *Pythium* on dozens of samples. It is enough to make you long for the drought we had last year.

The problem is not just on the east coast of Maryland. I have spoken to growers in Illinois and Ohio and they said they've seen too much rain and cool weather for their liking this spring. The same disease problems are showing up in the Midwest that we are seeing here.

This might be the year that you want to get to know your extension pathologists. You will need their services to identify all the nasty foliar and root diseases attacking your cut stems. Send them a dozen cut stems with leaf spot or anthracnose, or downy mildew. They'll love it.



Diseases are not the only thing thriving in this wet, cool environment. Slugs and snails are having a great time in this weather. I have not had to write any recommendation for slugs and snails for over two years. Yes, two years, because we had a drought in 2006, beside the one in 2007. Now, I'm regularly emailed photos of foliage damaged from slug and snail feeding.

Basically, slugs and snails are misplaced sea creatures. If the weather returns to hot and sunny with little rain, the slug and snail problem solves itself. If the rains continue, expect to suffer annoying and costly injury.

Here are some of the facts on slugs and snails. Approximately 725 species of land snails and about 40 species of slugs can be found in North America. Most of these species have been introduced from other countries via trading. The good news is that our good old native species are solitary in habit and do little or no damage.

Everything that is introduced seems to become more of a problem. The introduced slugs and snails are usually gregarious and may cause serious damage as they build up large populations in the cut flower growing bed. If your cut flower area has densely placed plants, slugs and snails will thrive. They just don't like open spaces with good air circulation. In tightly planted cut flower plots, slugs and snails can cause as much damage as insect pests. Eradication and control of slugs and snails is challenging and somewhat costly.

Leaf or flower damage occurs from the rasping action of the slugs' beak-like mouthparts. Damage to leaves and flower petals appears as irregularly-shaped holes with smooth edges. Slugs and snails can chew off succulent plant parts and growing tips that are close to the ground. Seedlings can be completely consumed.

If snails and slugs have been active in your cut flower plots, you'll often find a slime trail on foliage or even on your mulch plastic.

Control—Natural and Otherwise

Believe it or not, toads are one of the best predators of slugs and snails. On those rainy evenings when you are driving along in your car and spot toads leaping across the road, stop and scoop a few up and move them to your cut flower plots. Let them work their magic. They will migrate out of the plot when they consume their fill of slugs.

Several species of lightning bugs are predacious on slugs and snails. The larval stage of lightning bugs are called glow worms and they will feed heavily on slugs and snails. Ground beetles and rove beetles also feed on slugs.

Finally, in England they have a beneficial nematode called *Phasmarhadtis hermaphrodia* that has successfully controlled certain species of slugs and snails. Unfortunately, this nematode is commercially available only in England. Lucky Brits.

Metaldehyde has been around since I started my career with the University of Maryland, and when used in a bait it has been shown to attract slugs up to a yard away. The toxic effects of metaldehyde seem to be primarily due to dehydration as metaldehyde elicits excessive mucus production. Thus metaldehyde is more effective in dry weather. In wet weather, slugs sometimes can absorb enough moisture to compensate for the water lost in mucus production and therefore recover from the effects of metaldehyde. However, if slugs consume



too much metaldehyde, they do not recover. Slugs seem to become more susceptible to carbamate pesticides as they mature.

Copper sulfate is toxic to slugs and slugs will not crawl across a barrier of copper metal or wooden surfaces treated with copper sulfate. Baits with the chemical mesuroil are very effective in controlling slugs and snails.

One of the least toxic materials labeled for slugs and snails is iron phosphate. It's used in bait just like the mesuroil and metaldehyde. Supposedly when pests consume the iron phosphate it acts as internal toxin that kills them. There are lots of good testimonials out on this material working well, but I have yet to see a refereed journal article attesting to its effectiveness. I guess you can try it and see if it works for you.

I never thought I would long for the drought again but it sure would work wonders on dry up the slug and snail problems.



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*He would pore by the hour, o'er a weed
or a flower, Or the slugs that come
crawling out after a shower.*

Rev. R.H. Barnham

RESEARCH Update

Megan Bame

Funding for this column is provided by the ASCFG Research Committee.

The Effect of Water Stress on Big Bend Bluebonnet

Big Bend bluebonnet (*Lupinus havardii*) has shown potential as a specialty cut flower. It has blue racemes that reach 40-55 cm (15.7-21.6 in) in length bearing 25-30 fully open, fragrant flowers. In greenhouse cultivation, trials have shown flower yield of 20-25 stems per plant within 4-5 months. While native to southwest Texas, in cultivation bluebonnet requires a dry-down between irrigations; care should be taken not to overwater. Practicing water stress can be a difficult balancing act so as not to negatively affect plant growth. This research, conducted by Texas A&M University aimed to quantify the response of growth and flower production of Big Bend bluebonnet to various substrate moisture contents.

Seeds of *Lupinus havardii* 'Texas Sapphire' were scarified for 90 minutes with sulfuric acid prior to sowing. Seedlings were transplanted and greenhouse grown in pots so that moisture content could be quantified. Five substrate moisture contents were tested. The substrate was drip irrigated to near-container capacity, allowed to dry to the predetermined moisture level (assessed by weight), then rewatered to near-container capacity. When the average weight of 10 plants reached the target dry weight, the treatment group was irrigated. Treatment groups



consisted of 12%, 15%, 20%, 25%, and 33% substrate volumetric moisture content (VMC).

Racemes were harvested weekly at 40 cm (15.7 in) or longer. Other parameters observed included root and shoot fresh weight and dry weight, and leaf greenness.

Plants watered at 20% to 33% VMC had a similar number of cut racemes (25-30 stems). Fewer than 20 stems were harvested from plants watered at 12% and 15% VMC—a 35% decrease in yield. Leaves of the 12% and 15% VMC plants were not as green as those in the 20% or greater VMC treatment groups. Generally speaking, root and shoot dry weight progressively increased with a higher VMC.

This study showed that Big Bend bluebonnet can grow rapidly and yield an acceptable number of racemes when well irrigated after a period of water stress. The recommended degree of water stress was 25-33% VMC, which in this experiment led to watering every three to five days depending on growth stage and climatic conditions.

Niu, G., D.S. Rodriguez, L. Rodriguez, W. Mackay. 2007. *Effect of Water Stress on Growth and Flower Yield of Big Bend Bluebonnet*. HortTechnology, 17(4), pp. 557-560.

Chlorine Activity in Vase Solutions

Chlorine used in vase solutions controls bacteria and fungi, prolonging postharvest life of cut flowers. Five to 10 mg/L of free available chlorine (FAC) is sufficient to control bacteria in clean postharvest solutions. Contaminants and surfaces in the solution (i.e. stems) create a demand for the chlorine in solution and the levels can be reduced rapidly. Reduced levels may not offer effective bacterial control, however attempting to

compensate for an expected reduction by starting with a high concentration of chlorine can result in phytotoxicity. Researchers in Australia analyzed chlorine demand at various concentrations in multiple water sources, with various cut species, an increasing number of stems, and in combination with citric acid.

Chlorine concentrations of 0, 10, 20, 30 and 40 mg/L were tested in deionized water. Various concentrations were

also tested in tap water, well water and lake water. A single stem and multiple stems of *Grevillea* cv. 'Crimson Yul-lo' foliage were treated with various concentrations, and four cut flower species (*Rosa*, *Gerbera*, *Grevillea*, and *Limonium*) were observed in vase solutions with differing concentrations of chlorine. The mouth of each vase was covered with aluminum foil to prevent chlorine evaporation. Chlorine levels, pH and EC were quantitatively measured, while microbial growth (turbidity) was subjectively recorded based of visual observation of cloudiness in the solution.

The control (DI water only with various concentrations of chlorine) demonstrated relative stability as the initial chlorine concentrations were maintained over the course of 10 days. The DI water had a relatively low pH and very low EC, in most contrast to the lake water which had a relatively high pH, high EC, and was noticeably turbid. While the tap water and well water displayed a gradual decline, the concentration of chlorine in the lake water declined rapidly.

While the control solution remained stable for nearly 10 days, when one stem of *Grevillea* was present in the solutions, the concentrations decreased quickly with only the highest concentration remaining in any measurable amount by day 10. The submerged plant surface or leakage of organic

and inorganic solutes from the plant tissue could account for the chlorine demand and subsequent decline. Studies also showed that the more stems present, the more rapid the loss of free available chlorine.

The treatments of four species showed that rough stems (with bark or trichomes, for example) caused a more rapid decrease of chlorine concentrations compared to smooth stems. All four species exhibited stem bleaching, a phytotoxic response, when held at concentrations of 20 mg/L or greater. Upon the addition of citric acid, the chlorine concentration fell almost immediately to 0mg/L. While citric acid is commonly recommended as a postharvest acidifier, this study suggests it should not be added to chlorine-containing postharvest solutions.

Xie, L., D.C. Joyce, D.E. Irving, J.X. Eyre. 2008. *Chlorine demand in cut flower vase solutions. Postharvest Biology and Technology*, 47, pp. 267-270.

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Postharvest Life of Bird-of-Paradise

The reported postharvest life of Bird-of-Paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*) varies widely from less than 1 week to more than 5 weeks. This broad range may be due to differences in evaluation criteria or growing conditions. This study, conducted in Hawaii, aimed to determine the effect of inflorescence maturity, stem length and postharvest chemical treatments on postharvest life.

Three stages of inflorescence maturity were harvested and evaluated. "Immature" flowers were harvested two days before the commercial stage and had a small knuckle



on the upper side of the unopened bract. "Commercial" maturity was defined by a pronounced orange knuckle on the upper side of the unopened bract. The "Mature" flower stage exhibited one opened floret and was two days past the commercial stage. Stem lengths evaluated were 35 cm (13.8 in), 55 cm (21.7 in), and 70 cm (27.6 in).

Pretreatments used were: 1) 5, 10, 20 and 40% sucrose, 2) 5 or 10% sucrose plus 200mg/L 8-HQC and 150 mg/L citric acid, 3) STS for 10 minutes and GA₃ 25mg/L overnight.

Stems were placed in a plastic-lined carton with moistened shredded newspaper and held at 22C for 2 days to simulate shipping. Some treatments included a wet sponge around the stem ends during the 2 days while some did not. After "shipment," stems were recut and placed in one of the following folding solutions: 1) distilled water, 2) 10% sucrose, 200 mg/L 8-HQC, 10 mg/L silver nitrate, 3) 25 μmol/L aminooxyacetic acid (AOA).

When 50% of the individual florets showed discoloration, wilting, drying or darkening of the bracts, the end of postharvest life was recorded. Results, accounting for interaction among the treatment criteria, suggest a postharvest protocol for bird-of-paradise as follows: 1) Harvest at the commercial stage, 2) Leave stems as long as possible, 3) Pretreat with 5% sucrose, or a mixture of 10% sucrose, 250mg/L 8-HQC and 10mg/L silver nitrate for 24 hours, 4) Ship with a wet sponge wrapped around the stem ends, 5) Hold in distilled water or a solution of sucrose, 8-HQC and citric acid after shipment. The postharvest life determined by this study (according to these treatments) for bird-of-paradise was 14-18 days.

Bayogan, E.V., T. Jaroenkit, R.E. Paull. 2008. *Postharvest life of bird-of-paradise inflorescences*. *Postharvest Biology and Technology*, 48, pp. 259-263.

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GROWER Profile

Megan Bame

Judy Lessler

Harland's Creek Farm

Judy Lessler has been promoting organic agricultural practices since the 1970s. When she was in graduate school, she and her husband lived on a farm seven miles outside of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In an effort to create a community of organic gardeners, she rented garden plots to fellow students who agreed to grow organically.

After an extended hiatus as a mother of five and wrapping up a career as a statistician at a research institute (Judy's formal education led to a Ph.D in biostatistics), she has launched Harland's Creek Farm in Pittsboro, North Carolina, a successful certified organic farm growing vegetables and flowers for CSA subscribers and a farmers' market.

With her daughter's encouragement, nearly 10 years ago she took courses at the local community college in sustainable agriculture and starting a business (which included fleshing out the business plan). The business got off to a meager start in 2000, when Judy posted a sign by the road that read, "Beans for Sale." She made \$100 that year, but felt that was quite an accomplishment and forged ahead. Her initial business plan did not actually include flowers, but her husband told her, "You need to grow flowers, you'll love making arrangements," and she does.

Judy recalls her husband, Ken, called this new endeavor her "grand obsession." He was sick for several years, passing away in 2002, but he was always a helpmate to her. She remembers, "When he was able, he could make anything I could dream up. Even when he wasn't well, he would come and sit in the barn while I made arrangements, offering the occasional critique if a bouquet needed more work."

The farm has grown to nearly 6 acres, some of which is in cover crops each year, with about 25% of what is in annual production devoted to the cultivation of flowers. While most is field grown, the Lesslers constructed a parterre—a formal



garden edged in recycled plastic ties—that is decorative and in tune with the historic farmhouse, but functional as a flower production area. Dahlias and zinnias are crops that folks come to her for but she also grows alliums, bachelor's buttons, bearded iris, bee balm, bells of Ireland, cattails, celosia, cosmos, Dutch iris, echinacea, eucalyptus, flowering kale, foxglove, gladiolus, larkspur, lilies, lisianthus, marigolds, millet, narcissus, ox-eye daisy, peony, phlox, roses, rudbeckia, statice, strawflower, sunflower, tulip, and yarrow.

Judy takes full advantage of the foliage growing naturally over the property as filler for arrangements. Extra herbs also cross over from the vegetable plots for floral use. With a newly built 14' x 48' greenhouse and hoophouse, Judy is eager to try her hand at lilies in crates, ranunculus and maybe dahlias. She has a healthy variety of woodies for cutting and uses

many of the evergreens to extend the season by offering wreaths and special holiday arrangements through November and December.

The flower business began as a subscription-based service, which started with deliveries to coworkers in the office building where she worked before committing to the farm full-time in 2005. Currently she has a 70-mile route that delivers flowers to pick-up locations or businesses in Research Triangle Park, Chapel Hill, the Durham Farmers' Market and Pittsboro. This year, she has 20 subscribers of which 6 are businesses.

Judy chooses to grow heirloom varieties, natives and wild flowers. While they have a unique aesthetic quality, they don't have the longest postharvest life. Unfortunately, as an organic grower, she's yet to find a good organic flower conditioner, depending on extreme cleanliness and citric acid for flowers that need hydration. She expects arrangements to last a minimum of five days, though some flowers may last up to two weeks. The challenge, then, for business subscriptions, is choosing the best delivery day so the flowers will display best quality on the

businesses' peak days. For example, some businesses have more traffic on the weekend, so arrangements delivered on Monday would be fading by the time the majority of the customers start arriving. Similarly, some businesses are closed on the weekend, so a Monday delivery provides maximum flower impact.

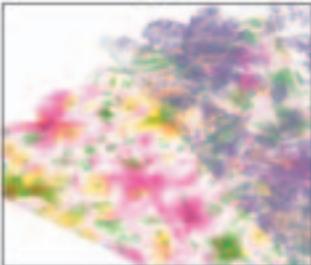
To help her customers appreciate the heirloom quality of her flowers, Judy sends a weekly email with interesting facts and tales about the flower history and heritage. For example, all of her peony varieties were grown in the United States prior to 1900. One of her motivations for pursuing old-timey cuts is the historic nature of her home. The house on the farm dates back to 1810 and is registered as a National Historic Site. In developing the business, Judy always had the home and property in mind. By opening beds and fields in a way that enhances the property, Judy plans expand the business by creating an agritourism aspect.

Already, the property has been used for weddings and events, but Judy wants to offer educational programming to teach others about organic farming. In all her offerings, she hopes to provide a cost structure that allows folks from all economic situations the opportunity to participate. In some cases she has provided the full floral services for the events on the property, but in other cases, the bride and bridal party have actually made their own bouquets and arrangements. It's an additional experience she can offer and an opportunity for personalization that so many brides seek.

While Judy has a website and posts a card with her arrangements that are displayed in businesses, she credits the majority of her increasing market share to word of mouth from satisfied floral customers. Last year's sales were up 80% over the year before and this year looks to be on target for an increase of at least 50%. (see Author's Note). Even with three price points (each worth 25 weeks of flowers): \$250 for a "grower's bouquet" wrapped in a sleeve, \$400 for a vase bouquet picked up at the farm and \$500 for a delivered vase bouquet, Judy has found that it can be a challenge for folks to make the initial investment to participate in the program. However, once customers commits to a season, they almost always return the following year.

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The CSA programs (produce and flowers) came about while Judy was waiting for a spot to open at the Durham Farmers' Market. It took several years, and in the meantime, she needed a way to sell what she was producing. Now, the Farmers' Market accounts for more than half her flower sales, but the CSA is still a significant part of her market. Last year, Judy took the time to do a bit of experimenting with price at the market. One of her biggest revelations was that she could sell more \$5 bouquets than \$8 bouquets and come home with more money at the end of the day. The larger bouquets may have a similar amount of cultivated flowers, therefore a similar value, with natural fillers added. She credits fellow local grower Cathy Jones with teaching her how to quickly make a bouquet in your hands while at the market—a great way to move flowers.

While vegetables remain her bread and butter, accounting for 85 percent of sales, the flower business has shown its market value and growth potential. Since bringing new fields into production is one of Judy's greatest challenges, she hopes to grow the flower side of the business by integrating it with the agritourism endeavor—basically providing the flowers for the events held at the farm, events that highlight or at least recognize her efforts to continue promoting organic agriculture.

Author's Note: I interviewed Judy at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, May 20. We talked about last year's drought and the challenges of unpredictable weather. That evening, a hailstorm moved through Pittsboro, destroying crops on several farms including Harland's Creek. Here was Judy's assessment of the damage: "In addition to the bachelor's buttons, celosia, snapdragons, and Asiatic lilies, other flowers that were damaged significantly included peonies (blossoms were mostly harvested), daisies, marigolds, rudbeckia, yarrow, and hosta. The zinnias were just coming up; the gladiolus had no flowering stems, and the sunflowers had not been thinned and are okay. I am hoping the dianthus, gomphrena, and statice will recover. As far as vegetables go, I lost two-thirds of the tomatoes, most of the corn, all of the peppers and tomatillos, much of the eggplant, all of the spring head lettuce, and the collards. Kale, chard, pak choy, leeks, cabbage, tatsoi, turnips, beets, and kohlrabi had



significant damage but may recover somewhat so that we have one or two harvests from them. I hope so."

Judy's Cooperative Extension agent, Debbie Roos, posts weekly photos from her area on her Small Farms website. Many of the photos (all of the flower photos) posted on May 23 are from Harland's Creek Farm. Visit <http://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarmsfarmphotomay2108.html> for a look at the destruction.

So yet again, the weather has created quite the obstacle. The season is not lost, but certainly delayed. Judy followed up with this report a week after the storm: "We have been working steadily on the recovery. Local farmers donated tomato, eggplant, squash, and pepper transplants, and we have now put most of those in. We replaced some 400 tomato plants. Also, on Saturday, some members of the CSA came out and helped with mulching potato beds that had lost their canopy, planting damaged potted Persian shield in the parterre since these were not in condition to sell at market, and trimming broken branches from marigolds, celosia, and euphorbia. The celosia is already putting out new branches." What a fantastic display of community supported agriculture, in the truest sense of the words.

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BACK to Basics

Geoff Butler

Why Businesses Fail

There have been many attempts to define what makes businesses successful; unfortunately no one has found the secret formula to guarantee success. Certainly there are some common traits among high-performing businesses such as passion, vision, and unique marketing position. However, the jury is still out about what exactly will ensure market domination and long-term success.

Luckily, there has also been a lot of research done on why businesses fail, and here there does seem to be a far more quantifiable theme. Research done by Seattle-based Business Resource Services (BRS) indicates that approximately 60 percent of all new businesses will disappear within the first three years, and 90 percent in the first 10. This doesn't necessarily mean that they all went broke; many business owners will have simply given up because it's all too hard, and gone back to working for someone else. Others will have been taken over by their competitors, moved into other markets, etc., but the cold hard statistics are still very sobering for anyone considering venturing into the heady world of business ownership.

This same research has found that 90 percent of business failure can be attributed to faulty management—more particularly, poor financial management. If we can avoid these seven deadly sins, we may not entirely avoid the risk of failure, but at least we can maximize our chances of success.

Here are the primary financial killers of business:

1. Failure to plan properly before startup (otherwise known as errors of omission). This involves getting your structure right, having access to adequate capital, knowing your market, and determining your human and physical resource requirements—all of the things that a good business plan should tell you. The good thing about not planning, however, is that failure comes as a complete surprise, and isn't preceded by a period of worry and depression.
2. Failure to monitor financial position. Developing a profit plan and cash flow budget, and the monitoring performance to determine variance. Looking at ratios and benchmarking to determine stability and efficiency, both against industry figures and your own targets. Remember, if you're not doing so well and the rest of your industry is, chances are it's your fault.
3. Failure to understand the relationship between price, volume and costs. Understanding how each of your expense categories varies with sales so you can accurately determine your contribution margin and break-even sales.
4. Failure to manage cash flow. There is an old accounting saying that profit is a matter of opinion, but cash is reality. If you can't manage your cash flow to maintain your liquidity, it doesn't matter how profitable you are, your creditors will simply shut you down.
5. Failure to manage growth. Growth is good but it can also bring you down if it isn't controlled. It never ceases to amaze some people that the majority of businesses that go broke each year are actually both highly profitable and successful. They simply grow too fast and therefore run out of the ability to fund the uncontrolled expansion.
6. Failure to borrow properly. The golden rule of borrowing is to match the terms of the loan with the life of the asset. Even bankers will agree that the worst product they sell is an overdraft, and yet many business owners put their cash reserves at risk by using this facility to make major capital purchases. Dealing effectively with banks and other finance institutions is critical to success.
7. Failure to plan for transition. For most owners, there are only three ways to get out of their businesses when they are done with it: sell it, shut it down, or give it away (usually to your kids). With the emerging demographic bubble as the baby boomer generation approaches retirement, and the majority of owners seeing their business as a major component of their retirement income, planning your exit strategy early will become crucial. Potential investors will target well-managed, systemized businesses that do not rely on the current owner for their continued success.

As I said before, there is no magic formula for success, and avoiding the above will not necessarily guarantee you achieve it, but it at least gives you the best chance of realizing your personal and business goals.

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REGIONAL *Reports*



NORTHEAST *Polly Hutchison*

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"People are just as happy as they make up their minds to be."
Abraham Lincoln

This, dear reader, is my motto for 2008. Our growing season started among endless discussions on the economy, the candidates, and the war: very little of which were positive! I didn't want my "growing" business to suffer a climate of fear and worry. So Pollyanna that I am, I have decided that business will be great this year, that new markets and opportunities will replace any flat growth in other areas, and of course, we'll get an inch of rain a week, no more, no less. Well, that's what I decided anyway. Wish me luck with that last one.

The other statements are so far proving to be true, actually, and I credit a few important things. One, the ASCFG and the knowledge base within our ranks: I grow better, healthier, more interesting flowers than my customers can find through the usual outlets. I know more about postharvest conditions, and I have resources in members with similar growing conditions who don't actually sell to the same customers, so the sharing is more complete. Two, the movement to buy local: this trend is nowhere even close to peaking, and honestly, I am not sure with fuel prices it will ever go back to the old ways. Eventually, the message of community economics will become stronger as well. Three, marketing flexibility and networking: I have built new contacts at local colleges and non-profits and keep looking for new ways to get the word out about the work that I do.

Now of course at this point in the year we are all so busy that it is hard to lay groundwork for future projects. But it is not too late to donate a few bouquets to a fundraising event, or scrub your knees and show up at a party or two with a business card conveniently in your wallet! Yes, I am tired, but broke and tired is worse.

The Northeast Regional Meeting is coming right up—July 21, 2008 in Saunderstown, Rhode Island. See your Short Cuts and mail for details. I have plenty of camping space if you want to come down the night before, or stay Monday night. There is also a local inn for the mattress-inclined. Marketing will be part of the program, and hopefully we can hear your new ideas as well!

My most pleasing crops for 2008 so far are the biennials and over-wintered annuals. I feel that I really got it mostly right this year. My over-wintered larkspur is so happy (September 15 planting) as is the bupleurum. My *Campanula medium* is cranking out stems, and I'll put in another vote for the Electron sweet William. Great colors! Now is the time to start sweet William (definitely by August 1) and campanulas for next year, and any cool new perennials you're dying to try out.

All the best with the rest of the summer. See you in Portland if not right here in Saunderstown!



MID-ATLANTIC *Andrea Gagnon*

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Work Smarter, Not Harder: Early Season Lessons

Spring brings showers, flowers, and hard-won lessons.

April and May are always sobering months for us. Expenses are at their highest, while farm income struggles to keep up. The tax season offers us an ultra-clear financial snapshot that magnifies the imbalances. I need only fill our cargo van gas tank a few times to realize the impact the current economy is having on us. It seems an overwhelming task to increase sales, reduce expenses, and control operating costs, but it's a reality we must face if we hope to survive and grow our business.

Rather than focus on the uncertain economy around us, we chose to focus on the economy of our farm—be it economy of scale, effort, or cost. For the past few months we've examined all areas of production for opportunities to improve. We targeted four areas: communication, sales, presentation, and efficiency.

Improved Communication Increases Wholesale Sales

We wanted to increase the number of wholesale customer in the face of tough competition in an area where talented growers (many ASCFG members) abound.

Nothing makes the point like a picture, so we developed a floral database (in FileMaker Pro) that automatically generates a weekly price and availability list with complete with pictures

of each product. Linked to our harvest list, in under five minutes, we can generate and e-mail price lists for our wholesale customers. Color photos have proven invaluable to designers, resulting in a 570% increase in wholesale sales over the same period last year.

Increasing and improving our retail sales required a different strategy.

New Markets (Hopefully) Increase Retail Sales

In addition to our three existing farmers' markets in the D.C. area, this year we are participating in the American Market at National Harbor in Prince George's County, Maryland. On the banks of the Potomac River, this \$2 billion, waterfront mega-development, anchored by the 2,000-room Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, the largest non-gaming convention center on the East Coast, promises to be a lucrative market for us *in the future*. Right now the dearth of residents seems inversely proportional to the potential of this market.

While the developers of National Harbor say that buyers have put down deposits on all but 48 of the 450 condo units for sale in the first phase of the retail-residential hybrid project, a favorable sign in a downward economy, this is not a producer-only market, so we must compete with wholesalers. New professional displays, clear signage indicating "locally grown" and banner signs showing our farm during peak dahlia season, we hope, will attract those customers looking for fresh local product. This year at least, our profit from this fledgling waterside market might not outweigh its substantial participation costs, but as residents move in and the word amongst the local population spreads we believe it is a valuable investment toward a more profitable future.

Nonetheless, we have finally crossed the physical and mental barrier of participating in multiple markets on the same day. Realistically, twice the markets equal twice the set-up, twice the staff, and twice the product; our challenge was to NOT make it feel like twice the work.

Practical, Pleasant Presentation

In previous years we have used a combination of folding tables draped with black tablecloths and crates to achieve a tiered floral display. Although the display looked nice, it took too much time and effort to set up.

Heavy-duty folding tables rode flat in the cargo van, with crates of flowers on top during transport that then slide out easily, negating the need to crawl into the van to unload. However, we had to unload all the crates and flowers onto the ground before we could set up the tables. This meant

that buckets were handled twice during setup—not as efficient as the new system.

To improve our efficiency and presentation and reduce labor, we recently purchased wooden, folding, tiered displays from www.benchsystems.com, a greenhouse/nursery bench company. Lightweight and easy to handle, they fold flat, and at just four feet in length, take up little room in the van. Now we can remove and erect the tents, followed by the display stands, and then the flowers. Setup takes approximately 15 minutes, with half the effort required as before. Not only has the overall presentation improved, but so has our efficiency.

Improving our overall presentation was calculated; improving our presentation of individual flowers happened somewhat by accident.

If the Vase Fits!

Typically, we present our product in an array of black floral cooler buckets sized accordingly for each crop/stem length. We are happy with this presentation, but have been frustrated this season by the sales of our tiniest blooms.

We have been rewarded with a bumper crop of sweet peas with beautiful long stems (9-15"). We proudly brought these to market in our shortest black cooler buckets only to have them sit relatively untouched. Early sales were usually confined to those customers who specifically looked for them, rather than the masses.

Disappointed, I would come home and place unsold stems in a beautiful glass vase and place them on my mother-in-law's buffet for all to admire. The vase was perfect for tiny flowers, resembling a typical 5"x5" glass cube that had been squeezed like a paper bag toward the top creating a smaller opening. The sweet peas fan out in every direction, each individual stem clearly visible through the glass and each bloom along each stem gloriously displayed.

Luckily I had extra vases and I boldly brought two to one of my windiest markets. Luckily they have very thick bases and a relatively low profile. Nervously I watched and waited. At \$1 each (10 stems for \$8) stems virtually flew out of the market, accounting for \$200+ of our sales that day. I was in sweet pea heaven. By this time the sweet peas are long gone but I've learned my lesson: improving presentation even on the smallest scale can make a big difference.

I wish all of our members continued success this season and look forward to the sharing of ideas at our upcoming Regional Meeting and the fabulous annual National Conference!





SOUTHEAST Susan Wright

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Ah...midsummer, anytime really, it's a balancing act. I won't say we do it especially well but we are always thinking about it. Our challenges this summer are getting better at judging buds, blooms and when to cut. We have the added challenge of predicting blooms for florists and brides. But by July everything settles down into steady dependable annuals. My husband Brent just started full-time on the farm in January. Just about the time the recession started. We get points for timing, anyway. They say you should start a business at the bottom of a slump.

Along with timing and finances we are all dealing with bugs. Whether you are a large or small grower, it always helps to know your insects. If you are still learning all the insects and weeds that are out to get your flowers, here are a few web sites that may help not only with the identification, but in some cases with control methods.

<http://www.attra.org/pest.html> This is the National Sustainable Agriculture information Service site. It offers many papers on organic insect, disease and weed control as well as many additional links.

<http://www.bugwood.org/images.html> This is the University of Georgia's invasive species site, with close to 30,000 insect photos by type.

<http://www.wssa.net/Weeds/ID/PhotoGallery.htm> Helpful weed id photos.

<http://ipm.ncsu.edu/AG136/ncstate.html> Primarily for the Southeast, this is an excellent, simple site for insect id and control.

<http://weedid.aces.uiuc.edu/index.html> Weed id photos by common or scientific name.

The www.usda.gov site itself is huge but full of information, from grant options to thousands of plant and animal photos. Try the National Agriculture Library section. <http://www.nal.usda.gov/>

Midsummer is the best time to think about perennial propagation, if you want an inexpensive way to get more flowers. Seed and cuttings started this time of the year are the way to go. Many perennial species can be started now, whether they need a head start before winter or they need weeks of warm weather followed by a cold spell to germinate. Now is when I start most of get my perennials.

Echinacea, Dianthus, Amsonia, Lupine, Penstemon and *Heuchera* can all be started now and over-wintered (depending on your climate) in the ground or in a cold frame in plug trays. Last year I found I had surprisingly easy success with *Allium flava*, a yellow, midsummer-blooming allium that is a bit pricey to buy as a bulb. I get many of my unusual perennial seed from www.jelitto.com. They have a very helpful sowing guide included in the catalog and on their web site.

If you want to grow shrubs for cuts and can't meet the ever-increasing minimums, try your hand at cuttings. Midsummer is the best time for many shrubs and you can easily get cuttings from friends or neighbors, sometimes even arboreta. The shrubs I find to be the easiest from cuttings are butterfly bush, hydrangea of all types, viburnum and lilac.

I'm looking forward to the Portland conference starting September 8th. I'm especially looking forward to all the farm tours; there is no substitute for actually seeing a farm with all its intricacies and meeting the grower on site. The bus tours are also an excellent chance to talk to other growers big and small. In this very informal setting you'll find everyone very open to sharing information. Have a great summer. See you in September.



MIDWEST Suzy Neessen

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Here at Wollam Gardens some of our help comes from an internship program. It's been interesting for me to have once been an intern on this farm, and now 10 years later, here I am in charge of them.

Our basic program runs for 10 weeks (or 50 working days), but we are flexible and have shorter stays available if need be, for people with special situations who want to learn but can't do that long a period of time. Those stays don't necessarily have the same benefits, though. The age and type of people we get varies greatly. So far this year we've had a 21-year-old woman from Minnesota who's studying anthropology and has very little gardening experience. Then a 35-year-old newly pregnant woman, who lasted only 10 days or so. She seemed to find the farm very enjoyable with its fresh air, good exercise, pleasant environment, etc. Or so she said, until she left for a few days to go to a doctor's appointment out of state and never came back.

A 20-year-old from Ohio is our latest arrival. She's gotten a grant from the American Floral Endowment to subsidize her stay here and she is very interested in pursuing some type of career in production horticulture. I can tell already that she's got the "bug", because even after doing a market in the morning and then working until 7 p.m. to get ready for the 2 markets we

have on Sunday, she still brought flowers in the house to arrange in vases that night.

The first two gals found out about us through backdoorjobs.com and were just here for the “experience” of working on a cut flower farm, so it’s nice to have someone here now who has a genuine interest in what we’re doing. She’s much more focused and asks lots of good questions.

Interns are paid a stipend of \$30 a day plus room and board. We try to eat pretty healthy here, though I wouldn’t say we never buy prepackaged junk food type stuff. Since we attend 5 farmers’ markets a week we buy or trade for a lot of our food there. Cooking is shared, with everyone making dinner at least once a week. On the other nights it’s FFY (fend for yourself). Whoever cooks gets out of doing the dishes for that night. I do most of the grocery shopping, so we all contribute to a list of what’s needed.

General cleanliness is expected to be practiced by all, whether in the kitchen or your own room. Cleaning chores in the shared living spaces are shared by all. I did not sign up to be anyone’s mother when I took this job, so I look at it as “If you’re old enough to come to the farm on your own, you’re old enough to take care of and clean up after yourself.” So that’s what’s expected. All the interns share the 1½ bathrooms and a washer and dryer are provided for everyone to do laundry. No pets are allowed to come to the farm, since we already have 3 outdoor cats, and an endearing neighbor dog who spends most of her day over here.

All interns work a minimum of 40 hours a week, but this time of year it’s more like 60. They do get one day off a week, unless they choose to use up their 50 days faster. If someone wants to stay past their scheduled time and there is room in the house, and most important, they are a good worker and pleasant to be around, they can stay on at an hourly rate, which is determined by what kind of a job they’ve been doing.

We try to make sure everyone gets exposed to all the many things there are to learn on a flower farm. Planting, seeding, watering, all the different ways to cut the flowers, how we make beds and run irrigation tape, getting ready for the markets or the florists and how that can be different. Also going to the markets, and hopefully they are responsible enough they can even do a market by themselves. This especially helps them to understand why we do some of the things we do in getting ready, like not packing the flowers so tightly in a bucket so they are easier for the customer to pull out, or why signs should be clearly written and prominently displayed.

The fine line for me, since I also live in the house, has been maintaining a level of professionalism, while still trying to “not be the boss” during non-working hours.

One of the problems we had when I was here before with one of the interns and now with another intern recently is that they come to the farm with the notion that this is some kind of summer camp. We certainly want them to have a great experience here, but they also need to understand that this is a real business and a real job that needs to be treated with some

sense of seriousness. It was a good lesson for me to learn that that issue, and others as well, are best dealt with right away before other intern or employee attitudes are affected as well. Otherwise, by the time you recognize it as a problem, it’s easy to say there’s only a few weeks left of their internship and we can put up with it until they’re gone. Not a very good solution.

It’s best, I think, to have policies, house rules, and expectations clearly written down so everyone understands what’s what. That way everybody’s experience living and working on the farm can be enjoyable.



SOUTH-CENTRAL *Vicki Stamback*

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All I can say is “Wow, is it summer already?” This has been one crazy season for a number of reasons, yet it has been a good one. Everything in the field is running 3 to 4 weeks behind normal because of cool, rainy weather. We have not had the days upon days of rain like last year but it’s been raining about every week or two and when it does rain, it’s usually two inches or more. Our first planting of zinnias, bless their hearts, endured two frosts after they were in the ground. They survived and are now finally blooming. And because of the late frosts, we still have not seen a sunflower and my customers are getting restless. With all the weather issues, flowers blooming late, and days when I feel like all I have to sell is air, I cannot complain because business is great.

As you know from past Reports, I do try very hard to keep very positive about my business and my life in general. Naturally we all have our days but doing everything possible to remain positive about business and life brings more of that to you. I know, I’ve seen it happen time and time again. I recently received an email from Marilyn Jenett, who has a business called Feel Free to Prosper. This particular email posed the question, “Are you a positive or negative impact on your business?” This caught my attention and I read what she had to say on this topic. I thought it was so interesting and true, I wanted to pass a few important points on for you to use during those trying times.

Look at your business and your clients and pick out those things that you can be truly thankful for. For whatever reason, it seems we all have the tendency to focus on the problem clients, the problem employees, or the business problems. Instead, focus on what is RIGHT about the business and be grateful for all your customers that you DO have. I personally do several things when I get up every morning. I picture all my customers buying flowers from me that day, I picture my whole day going perfectly: no traffic problems and all green lights, I picture receiving money for my flowers and I picture everything running smoothly at the farm and all the things that need to be

done for the day are finished and everyone is happy. Sound crazy? Try it and see how things change for you.

“I love my business and my business loves me.”

Repeat that either to yourself or out loud as much as possible. I know when I say it, any negative thoughts or feelings I am having about any aspect of the business just disappear and more positive things happen.

“I can’t wait to see what good comes from this.” If an apparently negative thing does come up, you can turn it around by thinking this. It’s hard for us to remember that an apparently negative event may be happening to guide us in a different direction that is better for us and for our business. I say apparently negative because we just think it is something negative, yet it all turns out positive for us. We have nothing to lose by assuming the attitude that great possibilities await us, even when the rest of the nation/world is having a pity party.

Instead of constantly wondering how we can get more business, let’s put our thoughts on what we can give at a time like this. This doesn’t mean give for free. What service can you provide right now that people need and will gladly pay for? This really gets those creative thoughts going, doesn’t it?

I have found this to be so very true when dealing with my customers. When I am happy, laughing, excited about my business, giving them service that no one else will and am positive, I sell more flowers. Don’t get caught up in the whining and griping about gas prices, politics, weather, employees, and the number of other things it is so very easy to complain about; it’s all negative and you will project that to your customers.

So, on that note, have a very prosperous season. I hope everything turns out how you want it to. Right now I am picturing myself at the Portland Conference and having a great time and learning a lot I can use for next season. I’ll see you there!



WEST *Brenda Smith*

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It is with great delight that I am writing this column. Unlike one or maybe two times previous where I was stuck on what to write about, I have so much to cover from the West Region Regional Meeting that was held on April 4. The meeting was held in conjunction with the West Coast Pack Trials and Sakata, American Takii and Goldsmith Seed companies were our hosts. Such a terrific program they planned for the ASCFG flower growers. We also took a slight detour and made one extra stop at Headstart Nursery. Tons of information was to be had.

Only 8 flower growers took advantage of this great program but we are planning to have next year’s Regional Meeting in the West with the same format. Plan accordingly, I promise you will not be disappointed.



I want to say it is my impression that a good number of folks do not realize the immense resource the seed companies are for growers. Seed companies don’t just produce seed for new varieties, they want growers to succeed and they have lots of technical information available on aspects of growing. These seed companies and their representatives who work with the ASCFG—Kathy Cron, Bonnie Marquardt and Jeannine Bogard—put great effort in making the ASCFG feel most welcome. Pack Trials are not all about showing off new varieties.

The plant breeders were all available at each of these companies and they wanted information from us, the growers. I know one plant breeder asked the group what would we, as growers, consider the most important trait for a successful cut flower? Of course, we all had a different answer: Dave Dowling, our ASCFG president, quickly answered “short crop time”. This is so true, if we can get our flowers in and grown and blooming in a short time, we can get more to market. There are many traits that we look for in growing the perfect cut flower. I was impressed that the plant breeders respected our opinions and asked us questions. This is an important information exchange and an important purpose of Regional Meetings.

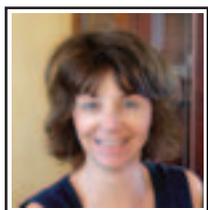
At each of the tour stops we were treated to the greatest displays of blooming flowers. Not all the varieties were cut flower varieties but each company specifically tailored a tour for the cut flower growers and we were able to talk with their plant breeders about what they are working on in the cut flower arenas. All the companies had a good selection of their cut flower varieties blooming for a great comparison session. What a creative day for my mind, considering all kinds of new ideas and varieties.

Packed in among all the varieties were tons information on performance trials of the varieties as well as growing tips. I have indeed neatly filed these in my office. I also want to tell you about an internet resource that I found out about at the meeting. You may be interested in putting on your ‘web favorites’ list. www.infoflora.com is an informational website loaded with industry information and statistics. The website currently has a

database of over 2000 varieties. Given the popularity of the ASCFG's own Bulletin Board, I think many of you will find this an interesting and helpful site.

One thing that struck me in our tours was that with Pack Trials, the companies are showcasing their varieties and they had great ideas for just that—showcasing. As a direct marketer of flowers, I felt there were tremendous ideas for how to display flowers. These ideas could easily be translated to making booths at farmers' markets or flower displays at stores into ones that customers would be immediately drawn to. It's that old adage; you never know where you will get that next good idea.

Finally, I must comment on the absolute amazing hospitality of our tour hosts. As flower growers we toil away and yes, occasionally wonder if anyone appreciates our efforts. The West Regional Meeting was a day to make you, as a flower grower, feel that you are appreciated. In addition to the feast for our eyes and our minds, our tummies were happy that day as well. To Kathy, Bonnie, Jeannine and all your staff who put on such a great day, I can't thank you enough and am already looking forward to next year's meeting. I know I came home a better flower grower.



NORTHWEST *Jeriann Sabin*

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When asked what it takes to become an author, Anthony Doerr, Idaho writer-in-residence, replied that it takes more than talent and a good idea. Everyone has an idea for a great book, just ask them. It is the ability to work in isolation for hours and hours, day after day, that brings an idea to the page. Hearing this I had an immediate sympathetic response. Half of the year I work in isolation in my studio pushing puddles of color around. The other half is spent farming with my husband, Ralph, which is pretty much like being alone. Delivery days are big social events during the growing season. Becoming active in the ASCFG has breached this isolation as I connect with members nationwide.

My first ASCFG national conference was a real eye opener. For days I was surrounded by people serious about cut flowers. Talented folks dedicated to producing the best flowers using the best practices—farmers passionate about the land and the people they serve. Dazed, I walked in and out of lively conversations about pest management, crop rotation, hoopouses and drip irrigation! I introduced myself to tons of folks and asked questions until I dropped. The free exchange of information was so positive and invigorating.

So early this spring, when I traveled to Eugene with my daughter, I thought it would be an excellent opportunity to meet some of the people in my region. Flipping to the location section

in our members' phone book and cross-referencing Oregon growers I found a Eugene address. I emailed Bob Nagler and Rachel Mordhorst at Rhythm & Blooms and they invited me out for a farm visit. They farm thirteen acres, have three retail spaces (we found one by accident in the most charming renovated warehouse area), sell wholesale and do farmers' markets.

On a perfect spring morning we headed north, passing over the Willamette River as we drove between the beautiful hills that surround Eugene and bookend the fertile valleys of the area. This place is a paradise—deep dark chocolate soil, covered in lush greens, broken in staccatos of spring color, reminiscent of a spring spent in Ireland. Bob's easy instructions took me right to their lane, identified by a "slow children" sign and bordered by grape vines, which wound around to their home, barn and fields. Bob and Rachel made us very welcome as we chatted under blooming trees surrounded by bird song. (I was enchanted by the scrub jays, incredible blue birds that look like pieces of sky breaking free and taking flight!)

As Bob squired us around their beautiful farm I recognized so many things we grow in common, but was amazed by the differences. Naturally, spring in this "coastal" region is at least a month ahead so we were gorging on color but I was awestruck by the size of the plants and their capacity and rapidity of growth. We live in adjoining states but there is a world of difference farming in this lush humid valley and in the high desert plains of Idaho.

After touring the fields Bob took us through the greenhouses where we saw a new crop of lilies, another similarity, and a house with hanging baskets, some with flowers and some with tomatoes—great idea! Then he took us to the "brains" of the operation, the barn where Rachel was hard at it gearing up for Mother's Day. Yep, that's right, these wonderful people allowed total strangers to visit during the most frantic time of year. ASCFG members are so cool!

Just about anyone can plant seeds but not everyone has what it takes to bring a crop to fruition. Rare is the individual who jumps out of bed before dawn, charged up, ecstatic to cut, water and weed day after day, after day. We all drool over glossy plant catalogues—aka garden porn—that arrive in the dead of winter, eating up the color and textures, but very few care to endure the long lonely days of a cut flower farmer. ASCFG membership brings us together online daily and breaks up the isolation regularly with the *Quarterly*. Regional Meetings and the National Conference encourage personal connections and provide opportunities for networking. With so many options why not explore a few and really use your membership to break out of isolation and get connected?

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or high quality cut flowers.
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802-485-8428 or epincus@tds.net for list.
www.thirdbranch.com



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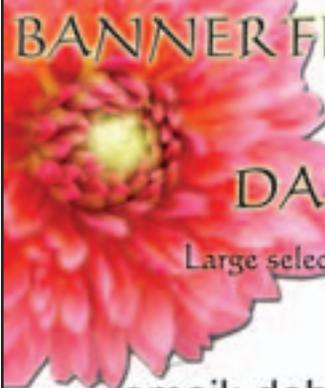
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Summer Reading

***Herbaceous Perennial Plants: A Treatise on their Identification, Culture and Garden Attributes*
Third Edition, by Allan Armitage**

Reviewed by John Friel

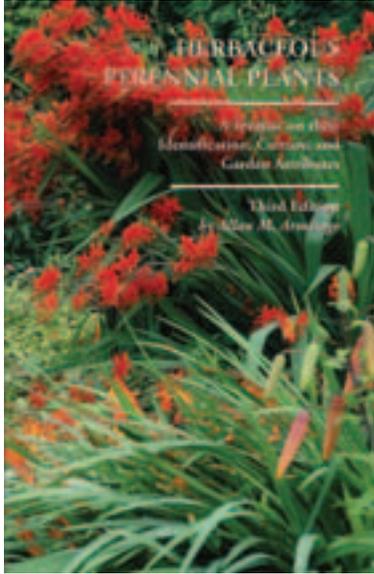
The third edition of Dr. Allan Armitage's *Herbaceous Perennial Plants* has been released, and all I can say is: It's about time.

Okay, actually I can say more. In fact, Judy Laushman insists that I do so. And all good ASCFGers know how hard it is to say "No!" to Judy.

Those familiar with perennials know that in the 11 years since the second edition of *Herbaceous Perennial Plants* debuted, its subject has evolved at warp speed. So it's no surprise that *HPP3* is not just updated but greatly expanded, weighing in at 1,109 pages of nomenclature, descriptions, growing tips and philosophy, plus xxix pages of foreword. There are new plants, useful lists of dependable varieties, and fascinating insights into the personalities behind introductions new and classic.

Those familiar with the first two editions of *HPP* know that despite its dry title and pedantic-sounding subtitle, "*A Treatise on their Identification, Culture and Garden Attributes*," this is no austere academic text. In few if any textbooks will you find words like "therapy, creativity and excitement." But that's what gardening brings to its practitioners. Those who have heard one of Dr. Armitage's many presentations, even if they've not experienced his books, will hear his voice as they read; the same wit, experience and passion that make him one of horticulture's most popular speakers (ask anyone who has had, as I have, the mixed blessing of following him on the podium) inform and illuminate every page.

Perhaps Dr. Armitage's greatest gift is his contagious enthusiasm. In print as in person he has that rare ability to inspire that marks a true teacher. And perhaps the most inspired inspirational message this book holds for gardeners is, Try it! He grudgingly admits that, though "imperfect," USDA hardiness zone ratings are "the best we have... to objectively evaluate geographical limits of adaptability." But he gleefully points out, "Plants don't read, and testing species where they are not supposed to grow often provides pleasant surprises."



That optimism, however, has its practical limits. He does not hesitate to chide the "respectable mail order nursery" that committed the sin of using *Meconopsis betonicifolia*, the gorgeous but fatally finicky Himalayan blue poppy, on its cover. For all but those fortunate few gardeners who inhabit regions that can supply its rock-star demands, growing *Meconopsis* leads only to "frustration and failure," he warns. "They die, usually within one year."

From a point of view that is at once mercenary and aesthetic, I heartily applaud the good doctor's advice that gardeners should try plants that are "not supposed to grow" in a given area. We are living through a sound-bite era. Marketing gurus are too quick to tell retailers that their main mission is to dumb gardening down to where success is guaranteed to even the dumbest brown-thumbed wannabe gardener, lest she abandon all hope and default to silk or plastic for her color fix. How boring! How insulting, how condescending!

Thanks to his having gardened in the unyielding cold of his native Canada and in the sticky heat of his adopted Georgia, Armitage has a better feel than most writers for the many important differences and surprising similarities between gardeners and garden plants in vastly different climates. Thanks to his marketing experience via his "Athens Select" plant introduction programs, he has a better feel than many ivory tower types for the mercenary facts of life related to getting good new stuff into the market and the landscape.

Its author's ability to straddle disparate worlds is what makes this book work. Armitage bridges many of the unfortunate gaps that exist in the supply chain from breeder to gardener, and in the information chain from academia to garden center.

Lest this screed read like an unqualified puff piece, it is necessary to point out a few disappointments. Judy's relentless editing and proofreading have wrought marvels on Armitage's sometimes haphazard grammar, so this edition reads much better than its predecessors. But there are still occasional nomenclatural disparities, such as the missing umlaut on *Aster xfrikartii* 'Mönch', or the improper space between the x and the specific epithet in various places.

I cannot fault Armitage's reluctance to adopt the new genera that the taxonomists have inflicted upon the genus *Aster*, names that he correctly damns as "gruesomely unspellable." Most of us in the business are still very much on the fence about what he calls, again correctly, this "major hit" upon a favorite genus. Somewhere in the foulest bowels of Hades there awaits a special circle labeled (in Latin) "Splitters."

Another disappointment: I hate to say it, but it's the line drawings. I'm usually a fan of botanical line drawings which, when well-executed, can illustrate a plant's characteristics more clearly than the sharpest photograph because there is nothing to

distract the eye from the structural element the artist has chosen to illuminate. Something went quite wrong here.

In fairness, most are fine; the drawings in the “Leaf and Flower Terminology” section are clear and useful, and the *Heuchera* renderings are splendid, as are the *Paeonia*. But others, like *Lysimachia nummularia* ‘Aurea’, are a mess. After some puzzling over the cause of the problem, I’m inclined to blame the printing process, rather than the artists, since in many cases even the caption is smeared and blotted-looking, like a bad photocopy. One can’t fault the penman for that.

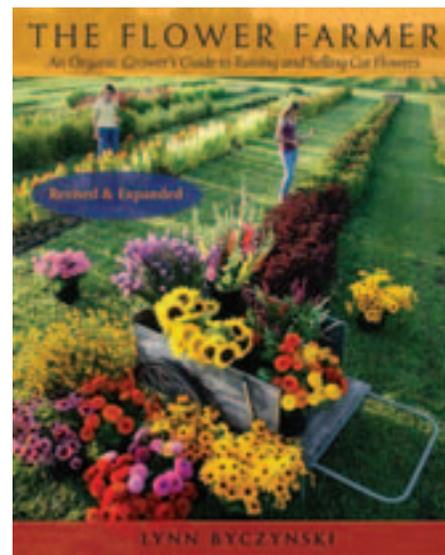
On the plus side, this edition includes more excellent color photographs than ever. I wish only that they were larger, but then this would be dangerously close to becoming a coffee-table book. Let it never be so. This is a book to be used, at every level of horticulture from classroom to potting shed. It has already taken an honored place in my reference library.

The Flower Farmer: An Organic Grower’s Guide to Raising and Selling Cut Flowers, Second Edition

by Lynn Byczynski

Reviewed by Dave Dowling

Looking at the front cover photo, you see wide grass aisles and beds of cut flowers that stretch beyond view. In the foreground are buckets overflowing with freshly picked colorful flowers. It could be the view looking out over Martha’s back yard. But wait a minute—this is a real working farm, one that pays the bills and is actually worked by the farm owner and



employees. This is a real cut flower farm, not some TV show prop. This is a working farm run by someone who knows what she is doing, but what is more important, someone who knows how to put it all down on paper and inspire others to do the same.

This book is *The Flower Farmer: An Organic Guide to Raising and Selling Cut Flowers*, by Lynn Byczynski. Ten years after the first edition, the author has updated and greatly improved on the earlier version to include dozens of colorful photos, and information on greenhouses, hoopouses and season extension. All items missing from the now outdated first edition.

Reading through the book, I was continually amazed at how thoroughly every aspect of cut flower production and marketing was covered. Everything from the basics of soil health and site selection, to postharvest and marketing is covered in depth. There’s even an explanation of the parts of a flower and the many flower forms. Do you remember all of them?

The farmer profiles at the end of most chapters contain many faces familiar to *Quarterly* readers. Many of those profiled are long-time ASCFG members whose successes serve as validation of the information contained in the chapter. These growers should be proud to be profiled in such a quality publication.

The forty-five pages of Recommended Flowers can serve as a reminder of all the flowers you’ve said you need to try some year, but keep putting off. Included is information on the newest plant varieties developed specifically for the cut flower industry. This book may be just the inspiration you need to kick-start your planting list.

For beginners and seasoned pros alike, if you are growing cut flowers and want to do it right, you should have this book on your desk within easy reach. Be sure your workers have a chance to read it too. Knowing how much work is involved in running a successful cut flower farm, I don’t know how Lynn found time to write such an thoroughly inspirational book, but I’m glad she did.



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Celebrating 20 years

2008 marks the 20th year of the ASCFG's existence. Throughout the year, we'll use these pages to remember the progress of the ASCFG from 1988 to 2008. If you have a recollection of a memorable ASCFG moment to share, please send it to us and we'll use it in this section.

ASCFG Conferences are informative and valuable. They're also a lot of fun, bringing together growers from all walks of life, ages and experiences. They've been held in Ventura, California, Burlington, Vermont, Vancouver, British Columbia, Orlando, Florida and virtually everywhere in between. Although all conferences are similar, each meeting has its own personal flavor, sweetened by that year's planners, attendees, and locations. Here's a sample of some.



The flower room before the 2007 Floral Design Competition.



A standing-room-only presentation.



The hotel bar used to be a popular gathering place after conference sessions.



Attendees piled on to hay wagons to tour Star Valley Flowers in 2002.



Mike Mellano Sr. greeted lunch attendees in San Diego at the 2001 Conference.



MaryLee Johnson was speechless upon receiving the Outstanding Service Award in 1999 at the Worcester Conference.



In 1998, Alex Hitt got a boost from a cultivator during the Raleigh tours.



John Zehrer welcomed growers to Star Valley Flowers in 2002.



Two friends from west central Michigan—Howie Lubbers and John Dole.



Bernie Van Essendelft (right) with the late David Jenkins, mentor to many woody cuts growers in the ASCFG.



Straw bales always make handy seats and tables for Conference tours.



Monika Roth and Matt Gerald celebrate Halloween at the 1998 Conference in Raleigh.



The Mission at San Juan Bautista made a good backdrop for the 2006 Conference tour.



Growers' School attendees learn the best way to pack flower boxes in Orlando, 2004.



Frank and Pamela Arnosky served as auctioneers for many years.



Leah Cook and Judy Laushman look over the offerings for the Design Competition.



Cathy Sutcliffe's entry in the 2005 Lancaster Design Competition.



Mike M. Mellano and Nick Warmerdam celebrate their 2005 Auction winnings in Lancaster.



At the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center (Austin, 2000), Ray Gray challenged Will Fulton to a dip in the pond, as Roy Snow and Rudolf Sterkel looked on.



Bob Wollam is wrapped in the 2007 quilt at the Raleigh Conference.

The ASCFG Welcomes its Newest Members

Dan Bailey, Bailey Nurseries, Inc., St. Paul, Minnesota
 John Beale, Newberry Farms, Olive Branch, Mississippi
 Holly Bevins, Sparta, North Carolina
 Ursula Brons, Boreal Farms, Christopher Lake, Saskatchewan
 Steve Dionne, United Floral Exchange, Vista, California
 Joyce Evans, Gardens of Joy, Forest Hill, Maryland
 Bonnie Foster, Colleyville, Texas
 Marie Hawley, Sassy Massey, LLC, Appleton, Wisconsin
 B.J. Hudgins, Belroi Gardens, Gloucester, Virginia
 Dave MacKnee, Dave MacKnee Realty Corp.,
 Calverton, New York
 Jason Meyer, Texas Floral, Azle, Texas
 M. Christine O'Connell, Middletown, Rhode Island
 Pam Pahl, Pahl's Farm, Woodstock, Maryland
 Jesse & Alicia Robertson, Cave Junction, Oregon
 Hillary Snavelly, Manheim, Pennsylvania
 Mark Tompkins, Dayton, Oregon

ASCFG Flower Search Now Active



Check it out at www.ascfg.org

An ASCFG Regional Meeting

is coming to your area

Midwest

July 6, 2008
 Madison, Wisconsin

Northeast

July 21, 2008
 Robin Hollow Farm
 Saunterstown, Rhode Island

Mid-Atlantic

July 28, 2008
 Bridge Farm Nursery
 Cockeysville, Maryland

Specialty Cut Flower Mid-Summer Tour

July 29, 2008
 Harman Farm
 Churchville, MD

Thank you ASCFG Research Foundation Supporters!

Chet Anderson	Wanda Kelly
Deborah Barber	Susie Kinzie
Maureen Charde	Bob Koenders
Becki Conner	Mark & Sandy Kurtz
John Dole	John LaSalle
Dave Dowling	Colin McLean
Janet Foss	Dennis Milar
Patti Foust	Tom Parker
Shannon Fulton	Bev Schaeffer
Matt Gerald	Katharine Stanfield
Mel Heath	Bernie Van Essendelft
Amy Hicks	Chris Wien
Betsy Hitt	Johnathan Yu
Darrell Johnson	

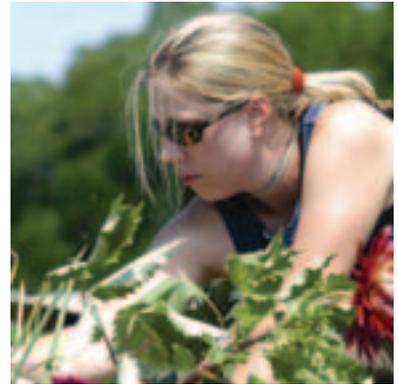
*Congratulations to Members Celebrating
Ten Years with the ASCFG!*



Leah Cook



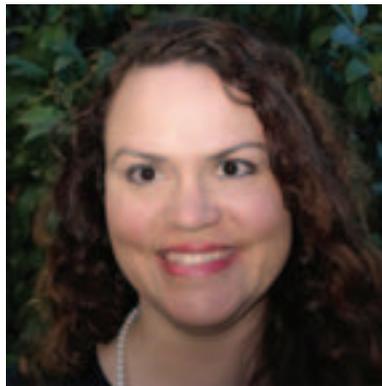
Mary Denton



Kelly Dionne



Juan Feddes



Lane Greer



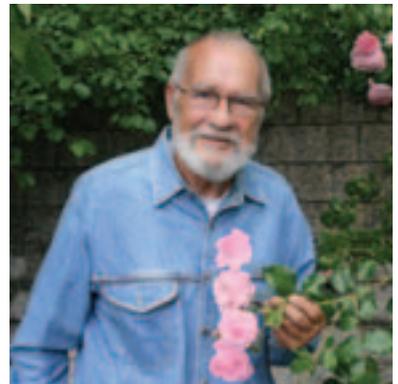
Jim Mercer



Suzy Neessen



Mary Vaananen



Don Vanderbrook



Patrick Zweifel



Picture unavailable

A★S★C★F★G Elections



Treasurer

Chas Gill, Kennebec Flowers, Bowdoinham, Maine

Chas has been ASCFG member for eighteen years. He and Linda farm 20 acres, growing mostly annuals and bulb crops. All crops are sold at area farmers markets. Being a small business owner and a past Regional Director prepares him for the treasurer position. “Having watched the ASCFG grow and change over the past years I am excited for the opportunity to protect and manage the financial needs for the group.”

Secretary

Carolyn Tschetter, Tschetter’s Flowers, Oskaloosa, Iowa

Carolyn and Quinton started their flower business in 2000, and now sell at the Des Moines Farmers’ Market, and to area florists, businesses and private customers, including a fresh flower bouquet subscription service. The Tschetters have been ASCFG members since 2002. They give the ASCFG credit for their success as not only growers but also of sellers of fresh cut flowers. Their musical contributions have enlightened several ASCFG meetings, and they look forward to being the first couple to serve on the ASCFG Board of Directors. The Tschetters give the ASCFG credit for their success not only as growers but also sellers of fresh cut flowers.



Midwest Regional Director

Quinton Tschetter, Tschetter’s Flowers, Oskaloosa, Iowa

Carolyn and Quinton started their flower business in 2000, and now sell at the Des Moines Farmers’ Market, and to area florists, businesses and private customers, including a fresh flower bouquet subscription service. The Tschetters have been ASCFG members since 2002. They give the ASCFG credit for their success as not only growers but also of sellers of fresh cut flowers. Their musical contributions have enlightened several ASCFG meetings, and they look forward to being the first couple to serve on the ASCFG Board of Directors. The Tschetters give the ASCFG credit for their success not only as growers but also sellers of fresh cut flowers.

South-Central Regional Director

Josie Crowson, Josie’s Fresh Flowers, Nacogdoches, Texas

I decided to take the plunge and try this business after attending the 2002 ASCFG Conference in Madison, Wisconsin. I was impressed with the growers I met and especially with what many growers said about their business: “I’m not making a lot of money, but I **love** what I’m doing.” Now, that’s what I feel too.

We have a 51-acre farm in Nacogdoches. I have all field-grown flowers on about 1 acre, mostly annuals, but this year I have added some perennials. I sell to florists, at our local farmers’ market, by subscription, for special events and at a couple of other retail outlets.

Why serve on the Board? This is absolutely the best organization I have ever joined, and I want to give something back. What can I give? Well, that’s a question. I was trained as an economist, not a horticulturist, so my knowledge of flowering plants and their issues is pretty recent and limited. Also, I will be following the most fantastic Regional Director you can imagine—Vicki Stamback—so that’s pretty daunting. All I can say is, I will give the Regional Director job my very best, because that’s what this organization deserves.



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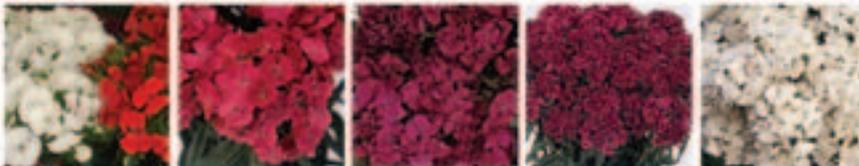
As a professional greenhouse and field cutflower , sweet produces high yields of salable stems in solid. The first year flowering plants are very uniform for height and flowering time.

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20th Anniversary ASCFG Conference

September 8-11, 2008

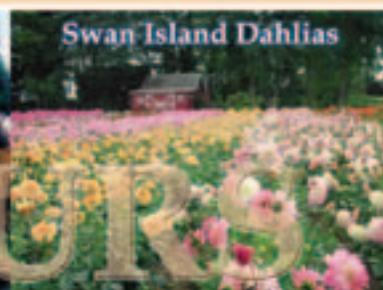


Monday
September 8
Growers' School

Tuesday
September 9
Tours, Sessions

Wednesday
September 10
Sessions, Trade Show

Thursday
September 11
Tours, Cruise



Portland Conference To-Do List

- Hotel reservations must be made by **August 12**. Don't wait that long, as our block usually fills quickly. Call (503) 233-2401 today to reserve your rooms.
- The **Portland Flower Market** tour is limited to 50 attendees, and is beginning to fill. Contact the ASCFG at ascfg@oberlin.net so you'll have a seat on the bus.
- Remember that **Tours** will take place rain or shine. The Portland Committee has assured us of only shine, but wear appropriate clothing, just in case.
- Take pictures now for your **Ideas from the Farm** entry. Don't be left out of this rollicking Conference event.
- Register now for the **Growers' School**. Attendance is limited to 85.
- Come prepared to celebrate the **ASCFG's 20th Anniversary** on the Columbia River!

20th Anniversary

ASCFG National Conference and Trade Show

Hotel Accommodations

Make your reservations directly with the Portland Crowne Plaza. Call (503) 233-2401 and tell them you're with the ASCFG Conference to receive our conference rate of \$119 (single or double). This rate applies three days before and three days after the Conference. **Reservations must be made by August 12.**

The **August 12** deadline is very important. Reservations are taken on a first-come, first-served basis. When the ASCFG room block is filled, the hotel is under no obligation to provide additional rooms, or to extend the conference room rate. Don't wait for the last minute to call (503) 233-2401 for your reservations.

The Crowne Plaza is located in Fareless Square featuring Portland's light rail system, called the MAX, which provides quick and easy access throughout downtown, and to and from the Portland International Airport (PDX). The airport is located just 10 miles from the hotel, a short ride in its complimentary shuttle.

Looking for a roommate?

Contact the ASCFG at (440) 774-2887 or ascfg@oberlin.net

Trade Show

This year offers uninterrupted time with your favorite suppliers. The Trade Show will be open Wednesday from 3:00-9:00.

Design Competition

The ASCFG Floral Design Competition gets more popular and more fun each year! You don't need to be a trained or professional designer to participate—everyone is welcome. Work on your own, or with others from your Region. Containers and floral material will be available for designs, but we ask you to bring your own favorite flowers, clippers and accessories, if you think they'll help put you in the number one spot. Regional "flavors" can be added to set designs apart.

If you wish to ship floral material (fresh or dried flowers, branches, grasses, pods, herbs) to the Conference, please ship them to the Crowne Plaza to arrive Monday, September 8 by 2:00 p.m. If you're driving to Portland, bring flowers to the hotel.

Members' flower donations are at the heart of the ASCFG Conference, and are needed to share and inspire the creativity of your fellow growers. If you prefer not to design, but would like to see your flowers included, please donate flowers, help fill water buckets, carry designs and decorate the hotel.

Portland Flower Market

Join us for a whirlwind visit to the Portland Flower Market. This market features 5 traditional wholesale companies offering cuts and floral supplies as well as a grower market area featuring blooms, plants, branches and decorative items from around the Northwest all under one roof. You'll get a taste of what's available, how it's displayed, priced and sold to retail florists and decorators. Talk with market vendors to get a feel for customer expectations. Don't miss a good opportunity to ask grower colleagues about color trends, customer demands and details that drive sales. Limited to 50 attendees.

Ideas from the Farm

Last's year's inaugural session of Ideas from the Farm proved to be one of the most entertaining and informative events of the Conference. Don't miss this year's program. Send us your own innovations and designs, and be ready to share them in Portland. The best Idea will be selected by popular choice and the winner will receive a special prize.

Tours

There's no place like Portland to see innovative flower farms against the backdrop of Mount Hood, the Willamette Valley and the dramatic scenery of the Oregon Coast. This year's selection of tour sites is outstanding, including calla and hydrangea growers, dried flowers, artichokes and snowberry, the largest dahlia grower in the country, all kinds of woodies, and one of the top perennial producers in North America. There is no way to replicate these kinds of tours in any other area of the country. Tuesday's tour includes a special lunch at Cape Lookout State Park.

Oregon weather is usually beautiful in September, but it can also be changeable. Remember to dress in layers, as temperatures can shift quickly from inland to coast. Bring rain gear just in case.

Sternwheeler Cruise

We'll cap off the Conference and our celebration of the ASCFG's 20th Anniversary with a dinner cruise on the Columbia Gorge, aboard Portland Spirit's sternwheeler. Join your fellow members and attendees for a great dinner, socializing and entertainment.



Growers' School

The ASCFG Growers' School is a unique opportunity to spend a day dealing with the fundamentals of cut flower production. Experienced growers and industry experts will share their ideas and practices. Afternoon hands-on sessions allow the attendees to participate in direct instruction. The Growers' School is a great opportunity for new growers to learn the ropes, and for established growers to brush up on basic skills.

- 8:00-8:15 am **Welcome and Introduction**
Lane Greer, Portland
- 8:15-9:30 am **Important Financial Lessons for New Growers**
Vicki Stamback, Bear Creek Farms
Stillwater, Oklahoma
Pat Zweifel, Oregon Coastal Flowers, Tillamook
- 9:30-10:15 am **What to Plant and Why**
Janet Foss, J. Foss Garden Flowers
Chehalis, Washington
- 10:15-10:30 am **Break**
- 10:30-11:15 am **Soils and Irrigation - the Basics**
Jim Owen OSU Extension, Aurora
- 11:15-12:00 pm **Harvest, Postharvest and Marketing**
Peter Mitchell, Flora Pacifica, Brookings
Gay Smith, Pokon & Chrystal, Portland
- 12:00-1:30 pm Lunch on your own
- 1:30-3:30 pm **Hands-On Sessions**
 - Maximizing Sales at the Market
Joan Pasco and Don King, Gresham
 - Tools You Can't Live Without
Janet Foss, J. Foss Garden Flowers
Chehalis, Washington
 - Making (Color) Sense of Bouquets
Jeriann Sabin, Bindweed Farm, Blackfoot, Idaho
- 3:30-3:45 pm **Break**
- 3:45-4:30 pm **Wreath-making Workshop**
Equipment, material and instruction provided.
- 4:30-4:45 pm **Question & Answer Wrap-up**

6:00-7:00 pm **Ice Breaker for First-time Attendees**
First-time attendees can mingle with other growers from across the country before the full Conference opens.

4:00 - 9:00 pm **Floral Design Work**
The flower room will be open Monday afternoon and into the evening to give you a head start on your entry in the competition. Meet some new friends and exchange design ideas, and have fun with specialty cut flowers.

Tours

7:30 am We'll tour to the beautiful Oregon Coast to visit three outstanding flower farms, and stop for an oyster and tri-tip barbecue lunch at the incredible Cape Lookout State Park.

Bear Creek Floral, Tillamook

Bear Creek Floral is the largest artichoke grower in Oregon. They are the home of the meatiest and the sweetest 'chokes on the West Coast. Additionally, they grow calla lilies, crocosmia, delphinium, oriental lilies, and sunflowers, selling them at several farmers' markets throughout the state, as well as at their retail flower shop.

Capeview Farms, Tillamook

Capeview Farms is a snowberry specialist, growing red, pink, green, and white. We'll see their two-acre snowberry field in full form just before harvest. Owner Kurt Mizée grows other woodies gathered from points around the Pacific Rim.

Oregon Coastal Flowers, Tillamook

Oregon Coastal Flowers is a leading U.S. producer of colored calla lilies and hydrangeas and other specialty cut flowers including gloriosa lily, sandersonia, eremurus, nerines, and others. September boasts their largest calla lily bloom of the year as well as 6 acres of their renowned antique hydrangeas in full display. Pat Zweifel has integrated many sustainable agricultural practices and innovative growing techniques into his production.

3:00 pm-4:00 pm **Growing Clematis as a Cut Flower**

Murray Rosen, Horticultural Consultant and former manager/head grower for Chalk Hill Clematis.

4:00 pm-6:00 pm **Ideas from the Farm**

Did you build your cooler from scratch? Have you perfected a bouquet-making technique? Are you handy with a welding torch? We're looking for your best "Ideas from the Farm" to share with other growers. Carry your camera with you this season and take pictures of your own ingenuity. Send them to the ASCFG office before the meeting, and you'll be able to explain your idea during this session. Last year this event was packed, so plan to be there early this year.

6:00 pm **Explore Portland**

Portland is known as The Rose City, one of America's greenest cities, and one of the country's most livable cities. A world-class public transportation system will take you from the hotel to a lively downtown, Powell's Books, Portland's incomparable Classical Chinese Garden, and too many brewpubs and restaurants to count. Grab some old friends, or make new ones, and explore Portland on your own.



Sessions

5:45 am-7:30 am **Portland Flower Market Tour**

8:00 am-11:00 am **General Session**

This opening session will include John Dole’s popular New Varieties Update and ASCFG Cut Flower Trials Reports, the ASCFG Membership Meeting (voting), and a special 20th Anniversary Keynote presentation by ASCFG co-founder Allan Armitage.

11:00 am-12:30 pm **Lunch with Your Region**

Join your Regional Director and growers from your area for an informative and fun lunch.

Concurrent Sessions

12:30-1:15 pm

Beauty and Profitability: The Return of the Rose

Erin Benzakien, floret
Mount Vernon, Washington
Jeriann Sabin, Bindweed Farm
Blackfoot, Idaho

Profitable Pricing

Joan Pasco and Don King
Market Consultants
Gresham

1:15-2:00 pm

Unusual Crops

Vicki Stamback, Bear Creek Farms
Stillwater, Oklahoma

Internet Selling

Marc Kessler, California
Organic Flowers, Chico

2:00-2:45 pm

Top Ten Ways to Make Money

Pat Zweifel
Oregon Coastal Flowers
Tillamook

Ramping Up Biology: Specific Applications of Compost Tea in Floriculture

Alison Kutz-Troutman
Sound Horticulture
Bellingham, Washington

2:45-3:30 pm

Lilies of the Field... and Greenhouse... and Tunnel

Dave Dowling
Farmhouse Flowers & Plants
Brookeville, Maryland

How Green is Your Valley?

Marc Kessler
California Organic Flowers, Chico
Diane Szukovathy
Jello Mold Farm
Mount Vernon, Washington

3:00 pm-9:00 pm

Trade Show

The Trade Show adds another networking opportunity to the Conference week. You’ll have face-to-face time with seed, plant and bulb suppliers, equipment companies and other vendors. The ASCFG Research Benefit Auction will take place here, as well as an informal reception.

Tours

7:30 am Today we’ll tour farms in the beautiful Willamette Valley.

Hammelmans Dried Floral, Mt. Angel

The Hammelmans’ family farm operation has offered quality dried and preserved florals since 1989 to the worldwide floral market. They specialize in larkspur, peonies, hydrangeas, garden florals, pods, grasses & herbs, harvested at peak conditions, dried or processed, and graded and packed with pride. They also offer select cuts for the fresh market and produce grass seed for the grass seed industry, and vegetables for the processed market. The Hammelmans take pride in their agricultural lifestyle and love to show visitors what they do.

Swan Island Dahlia, Canby

The largest dahlia grower in the country, Swan Island hybridizes their own varieties, and plants over 30,000 seedlings each year. A visit to their dahlia fields in September cannot be missed!

Oregon Flowers, Aurora

Oregon Flowers grows field and greenhouse crops for nationwide shipping year round. Dutch-designed greenhouses protect lilies, iris and tulips throughout the year. Field-grown seasonal items include peonies, tulips, brodiaea, eremurus, ixia, phlox, hydrangeas, sedum, rose hips and snowberries.

Terra Nova Nurseries, Canby

We are lucky to be able to visit Terra Nova, one of the premier ornamental perennial breeders in the country. Terra Nova is well known for their award-winning introductions of heuchera, echinacea, and tiarella.

4:00 pm **Dinner Cruise**

Celebrate the ASCFG’s 20th Anniversary with a dinner cruise on the Columbia Gorge aboard Portland Spirit’s sternwheeler. This authentic triple-decker paddle wheeler presents 360 degrees of breathtaking vistas of the historical and naturally beautiful Columbia River.

On Your Own

ASCFG member and past Board member Paul Sansone has offered to open his farm to growers on **Friday, September 12**. A former cut flower grower, Paul now is a biodynamic breeder specializing in perennial and woody plant species, including crocosmia and gentians. Information and directions will be available at registration.



2008 Conference Registration Form

Company Name _____
 Address _____
 City/State/Zip _____
 Phone _____ Fax _____
 Email _____

Student registration available to those currently enrolled in a certified horticulture, agriculture or floral design program. See discounted price below.

Payment Information:

My check or money order (in U.S. funds) is enclosed
 Please bill my: Mastercard Visa

Card Number _____ Exp. Date _____
 Cardholder's Name _____ Sec. Code _____
 Signature _____

**Questions? Call
 (440) 774-2887**

Make checks payable to the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers, or ASCFG

NOTE: Spouse/partner or two company members of ASCFG member welcome at member rate. This does not mean "two for the price of one"; it means additional attendees pay the same price as the first person.

Cancellation Policy: A full refund will be paid if cancellation is received prior to August 1, 2008; one-half refunded prior to August 10, 2008; after August 17, 2008 no refund can be made. No exceptions.



Growers' School Monday, September 8 <i>Register by August 1. Limited to 85.</i>	Full Conference Registration Tuesday - Thursday, September 9-11 T & Th Tours, Educational Sessions, Trade Show, Banquet <i>Growers' School not included</i>	Tours Only Tuesday & Thursday, September 9 & 11 \$100 Member before 8/1/08 \$130 Non-member before 8/1/08 \$120 Member after 8/1/08 \$145 Non-member after 8/1/08	Educational Sessions Only Tuesday - Wednesday, September 9-10 \$290 Member, \$410 Non-member before 8/1/08 \$350 Member, \$470 Non-member after 8/1/08 \$205 Member Single Day (indicate Wed. or Thurs.) \$240 Non-member Single Day (indicate Wed. or Thurs.) <i>Tours not included</i>	Flower Market Tour Wednesday, September 10 \$20 Limited to 50 attendees	Additional Banquet & Cruise Tickets Thursday, September 11 <i>I banquet ticket is included with each full registration</i>	Reserve a 20th Anniversary poster for me. \$10	TOTAL per person
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LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	Indicate the appropriate registration fee in boxes below						TOTAL

ALL ATTENDEES - Please indicate number attending banquet _____ Vegetarian total _____ **TOTAL AMOUNT DUE** _____

Return your payment and registration form to ASCFG: MPO Box 268 ♦ Oberlin, OH 44074-0268 ♦ fax (440) 774-2435

FROM *the Director*

Judy M. Laushman

As I write, I'm listening to NPR report on the second "500-year flood" in fifteen years in Iowa. I remember being in Des Moines for a nephew's wedding in 1993, the last time that such flooding took place. Just a few hours after the reception at the Marriott ended, water was lapping at the hotel's front doors. We left the state literally hours before the last Iowa bridge across the Mississippi was closed. Of course, we now know that "500-year" really

means that the flood has a 1 in 500 (or .2%) chance of occurring each year, not that they happen only once every 500 years.

Statistics aside, there is no doubt that this spring has bedeviled growers everywhere.

A few weeks ago, I talked to Phil Mueller about the second—and worse—catastrophic flood to hit Gays Mills, Wisconsin, in ten months. He seriously doubts the ability of Gays Mills to return to life, and thinks the entire town will most likely have to be moved, as happened to neighboring Soldiers Grove in 1978. Numerous vegetable farms and a flower grower, all of whom cultivate prized bottom ground, were also wiped out. Phil said "For these small, rural, shoestring budget farms, twice in 10 months is unsustainable."

Larry Johnson, who grows cut flowers just west of Madison, doesn't have fields actually under water, but his land hasn't had a



chance to dry out since last fall. He won't be able to get any annuals in this year, unless it dries out by July 4th, and he can squeak some sunflowers in before a late frost.

Every growing season seems to bring its trauma to growers across the country. And Canada: I remember Larry Zaleschuk years ago bemoaning the "The Big White Zamboni" that swept across his farm on the plains of Alberta, pulverizing his flower crops with huge hailstones.

But every year, you growers seem to bounce back up again like an inflatable

punchy-clown, always looking to the next round of planting, always assuming next year will be better, never saying "Enough is enough." There seems to be always another crop, another market, another season to try again. Vicki Stamback could only laugh (as only Vicki can laugh) when she told me a few years ago how many times she replanted sunflowers after straight-line winds flattened crop after crop.

Even with staggering gas prices and a downturn in disposable income spending,

cut flower farmers are finding new ways to market their product and themselves. Optimism is boundless, creativity is infinite, and enthusiasm is unabated. And throughout, ASCFG members still take time to share their experiences with each other.

Nowhere is this spirit of generosity more evident than at an ASCFG National Conference. Since our members market at so many different levels, and grow an astonishingly wide array of flower crops, there is no worry about competition as in other grower industries. Attendees come away with in-formation from growers in different states, of different sizes, and able to put that to good use as soon as they return home.

Bring that optimism, creativity and enthusiasm with you to the Portland Conference in September. You'll be rewarded with that generosity, and learn a bit about pop-up clowns.



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