

# home & garden



**SEEDS:**  
Celebrate daylilies  
in Amador  
County **PAGE 3**

**DEBBIE TRAVIS:**  
Tips for choosing art  
for your walls **PAGE 11**

## From farm to vase

FINDING LOCALLY GROWN CUT FLOWERS IS GETTING EASIER **PAGE 4**

### Cover story

## 'Slow flower' movement blossoms

We love local, organic food – now add flowers to the list

BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON  
darrington@sacbee.com

**F**irst came slow food. Now, think slow flowers.

Following the trend of locavores who seek food close to its source, interest is growing in seasonal, local, sustainable flowers.

In Sacramento this summer, the farm-to-vase movement is gaining momentum as small organic and urban farms add more flowers to their produce stands.

Local farmers markets feature colorful bouquets of old-fashioned summer favorites. Restaurants are requesting slow flowers to accompany their locally sourced entrees. Gardeners are finding joy in growing their own table top-pers.

To Shawn Harrison, "slow flowers" make sense. That's why his farm is producing some zinnias and snapdragons along with tomatoes and snap beans.

"The floral industry traditionally is chemically dependent," said Harrison, co-founder and executive director of Soil Born Farms. "Most of the flowers you see in stores are grown internationally. Their carbon footprint is huge."

"We can grow a lot of gorgeous flowers in our area, just like food," he added. "We know people want locally grown food. Locally grown flowers are a big opportunity."

Helping to drive the trend,

chefs started requesting bouquets as part of their produce orders.

Said Harrison, "It doesn't make sense to go to all of the trouble of using seasonal, organic, locally sourced food, then putting some flowers on the table that may have been soaked in intense chemicals and come from who knows where."

Garden author Debra Prinzing, who moved to Seattle from the Los Angeles area, challenged herself to make a bouquet of locally sourced flowers every week for a year.

"I wanted to debunk the myth that I'd have limited options," she said. "If the weather is cold in winter, what would I have to work with – twigs and berries?"

Instead, she found that there were more than enough flowers to dress her table year-round. She just had to look past the old standbys and think seasonally.

Instead of relying only on annuals, Prinzing mixed in perennials, flowering trees and shrubs.

"It has to be intentional, just like food," Prinzing said. "You have to make decisions. Everything is about choices."

Prinzing's personal challenge grew into her new book, "The 50-Mile Bouquet: Seasonal, Local and Sustainable Flowers" (St. Lynn's Press, \$17.95, 144 pages). A second book featuring her weekly arrangements is coming out soon.

She chose 50 miles as an



### BUILDING A LOCAL SUMMER BOUQUET

These flowers all came from farms and gardens within a few miles of Sacramento.

Manny Crisostomo  
mcrisostomo@sacbee.com

arbitrary limit, but stretched that boundary on occasion. The idea is to buy as local as possible. Even better, grow your own.

"Sacramento is in the heart of the country where people should be able to have flowers in their own gardens 12 months a year," Prinzing said. "Or you can find locally grown flowers nearby. Hopefully, people will realize how fortunate they are."

"I worked on this book for four years," she added. "The publishing world didn't get this book for a long, long time. We don't eat flowers; why should we care if they're organically grown?"

The recession also slowed interest in slow flowers, she noted.

"Flowers in America are considered a luxury good," she added. "We may not eat flowers, but we do handle them. The pesticides they're treated with come into our homes. Interest in health as well as sustainability has helped drive this movement."

So have farmers markets, a natural for offering seasonal flowers.

"Farmers markets are exploding," Prinzing said. "We've seen their numbers jump 17 percent since 2010. A lot of farms have found they can grow flowers, too."

Some farms have taken the next step by competing directly with floral imports. They fill the demand for organic, American-grown flowers coupled with the convenience of ordering by phone or online.

From its Terra Bella Farm in Chico, California Organic Flowers now ships bouquets via its website nationwide (www.californiaorganicflowers.com) or phone orders, (530) 891-6265. The family-run farm is a popular source for organic wedding bouquets and flowers for other special occasions.

California Organic offers dahlias, sunflowers, lilies and other popular flowers that can stand up to travel. Customers can check the



Lezlie Sterling lsterling@sacbee.com

**Cristina Martinez-Canton** cuts fresh flowers from a garden at Soil Born Farms' American River Ranch in Rancho Cordova. Organic flowers are important to consumers who worry about pesticides.

farm's flower calendar for what will be available when.

The Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op is among the first local markets to grab onto slow flowers. Many of their bouquets come from Pull Belly Farm in the Capay Valley.

"We made a conscious decision that we would only sell local, organic flowers," said Teresa Esperas, the co-op's education and outreach manager. "We only sell local organic produce, so that should apply to the flowers as well."

"We made the big decision when other supermarkets sell roses and tulips year-round that were flown in from overseas and full of chemicals," she added. "Instead, we've found organic

flowers can be so fun."

The switch to seasonal-only flowers created unexpected demand for some varieties as shoppers came to appreciate their short window of availability.

"Lilacs in early spring; we get people clamoring for them," Esperas said. "Customers get so excited. We carry old-fashioned varieties, and they seem to rekindle memories."

Seasonal bouquets often look like they were pulled from Grandma's garden. That's not a coincidence. Past generations grew many of these same flowers and decorated their homes and tables.

Snapdragons, zinnias, asters, cosmos, bachelor buttons – these flowers add

a touch of nostalgia as well as color.

Growing flowers also helps attract pollinators to farms and vegetable gardens, which means a larger harvest.

"I enjoy seeing the multitude of bees and insects that enjoy the flowers, too," said Cristina Martinez-Canton, who helps tend Soil Born's flower garden at its American River Ranch in Rancho Cordova. "This place is just buzzing."

"It feels good that I'm attracting beneficial insects that will help with agriculture," she said. "It's part of the ecosystem. And they're pretty, too."

Call The Bee's Debbie Arrington, (916) 321-1075.

### THE SKINNY ON BOUQUETS

#### Traditional paradox

Americans crave flowers that are not always in season or easily available. According to a nationwide survey by 1-800-FLOWERS.com, roses are the favorite flower for Valentine's Day, accounting for more than 55 percent of florist orders. Yet Northern California garden roses don't start blooming in March or later.

Other top florist flowers are carnations, tulips, orchids, calla lilies and Dutch irises. Greenhouse-grown, these flowers can be pushed outside their normal seasons.

More than 80 percent of flowers purchased in the United States are imported. With good climate and cheap labor, Columbia and Ecuador rank among the top growers. Africa, India, Australia and Southeast Asia also are emerging as floral exporters for a world market that tops \$100 billion.

The flowers in a typical supermarket bouquet may have been cut a week earlier, preserved with chemicals and hauled thousands of miles before purchase. Cut flowers are not required to be labeled with an expiration date, possible chemical content or country of origin.

By buying flowers that are locally grown or growing them yourself, you can substantially cut down that bouquet's carbon footprint, said garden expert Debra Prinzing, author of "The 50-Mile Bouquet: Seasonal, Local and Sustainable Flowers" (St. Lynn's Press, \$17.95, 144 pages).

Environmental regulations are spotty at best at flower farms in emerging nations, she added. That raises pollution concerns.

The alternative is to enjoy what's in season.

"Once they understand what they're doing to the Earth, people really want to do the right thing and find the resources to enjoy local flowers," Prinzing said. "That's why I wrote '50-Mile Bouquet,' hopefully to give people some tools they can apply in their own community."

#### Seasonal picks

Here are suggestions for making bouquets by the season including some of Prinzing's favorites:

**Summer:** Sunflowers, black-eyed Susans, snapdragons, dahlias, gladioluses, hydrangeas, cosmos, cornflowers, bachelor buttons, straw flowers, daisies, lilies, yarrow, garden roses, zinnias, asters, lavender, geraniums, calla lilies, lisianthus, other summer bulbs.

**Fall:** Asters, viburnums, mums, zinnias, garden roses and rose hips, ornamental grasses, fall foliage.

**Winter:** Amaryllis, paperwhites, citrus blossoms, forsythia, winter hazel, quince, hellebores.

**Spring:** Lilacs, ranunculus, irises, anemones, Icelandic poppies, tulips, daffodils, dogwoods, lupines, peonies, columbines, foxgloves, apple blossoms, sweet peas, dianthus.

#### Fresh tips

How do you make bouquets last longer?

Help the flowers drink. Cut off an inch from the bottom of the stems while holding them under water. That prevents air bubbles from blocking the capillaries and lets water flow up instead. If you cut at an angle, that creates a larger surface area for the stem to take up more water.

Remove any foliage from the stem that will be under water in the vase, and use fresh water at room temperature or slightly cooler.

In the vase, dissolve an aspirin in room-temperature water before adding the flowers. Or try mixing in a splash of 7UP or Sprite (not diet – your flowers want the sugar rush).

Display the bouquet in a cool area, away from direct sunlight or heater vents. After a few days, change the water and cut the stems another half-inch to extend the bouquet's life.

– Debbie Arrington