

A bouquet for the planet

Book makes the case for buying flowers grown close to home

By **WILLIAM HAGEMAN**
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Debra Prinzing has seen the numbers, and she doesn't like them. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the value of cut-flower imports into the U.S. for 2010 was \$847 million. Prinzing notes USDA estimates that between 85 and 98 percent of the most common fresh flowers are imported, usually from South America.

Prinzing, a Seattle-based outdoor living expert, says it's time to think local. She has written "The 50 Mile Bouquet: Seasonal, Local and Sustainable Flowers" (St. Lynn's Press), which tells the stories of people who grow flowers for local consumption.

Prinzing disdains foreign factory farms, where workers and the environment can be the victims of cheap flowers.

"Not that long ago, the idea was barely on the radar. In the last five years, we've seen this cultural shift," she says. "I don't want to call it a trend because it's not going back."

Q: Can you pinpoint when this idea started?

A: When Amy Stewart published "Flower Confidential," ... it exposed all of the problems with cut flowers. The book really raised people's awareness. I got to the end of the book, and I thought, OK, it raised people's consciousness, but we needed to provide a solution.

Q: This seems to be a natural extension of the local foods movement.

A: The rock star chefs always go to great lengths to tell these stories: the grass-fed beef rancher, where the honey is from, heirloom tomatoes. So I think the story of field to



ST. LYNN'S PRESS PHOTO FROM "THE 50 MILE BOUQUET"

A bride holds a bouquet of domestically grown dahlias.



"The 50 Mile Bouquet"

By Debra Prinzing
(St. Lynn's Press, \$17.95)

Finding locally grown blooms

Some sources from Debra Prinzing:

- Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers (ascfg.org; click on "Buy Local Flowers")
- Local Harvest (localharvest.org): an online directory of farmers markets, CSA farms, and organic farms coast to coast.
- California Organic Flowers (californiaorganicflowers.com): Order fresh-picked bouquets year-round.

vase, as I call it, is becoming just as relevant.

Q: The benefits are on several levels.

A: To me there is a sort of human component, then the Earth component. The first thing (buying local does) is shrink dependency on imports. It shrinks your carbon footprint. You buy local flowers, you're not just supporting a farmer. You're helping in most cases a family farm, and the local florist who is keeping his or her business going. It is an economic benefit. Anyone who shops at a farmers market already gets that.

Healthwise, it's just an intangible because you can't see the chemicals used to raise these crops.

Q: This takes a shift in one's thinking, but does it take a change in one's taste in flowers?

A: I think we don't like to be denied anything. Americans have this entitlement thing. ... You have to be conscious; you have to say, I want to enjoy flowers that are grown in my community and in that season.

Depending where you live, you may have a lot of evergreen leaves and branches in the winter. But maybe see if your florist can order from California, where florists are producing beautiful flowers all 12 months. ... It's better than imported flowers.

Q: The book can also be an inspiration to home gardeners?

A: There's nothing more local than cutting a bouquet out of your own garden. ... Bring nature indoors, and you'll be more local than anyone else.

bhageman@tribune.com