

# THE 5-MILE BOUQUET

Forget flowers grown on the other side of the world. The best blooms come straight from your local flower farm.

BY DEBRA PRINZING | PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID E. PERRY



Sunset February 2012 73

When you open your CSA box each week, you know that those crisp carrots, heads of broccoli, and bunches of chard were grown nearby and just picked, most likely by a small-scale farmer. But when you buy flowers, it's next to impossible to know who grew those blooms. Or where they came from. Chances are your stems originated in South America, where low-cost laborers harvest flowers that spend days on trucks and planes before reaching your corner florist. Fortunately, it's getting easier for flower shops, floral designers, and flower lovers alike to source locally. A farmers' market is one place to look. If you live near the Chico Certified Farmers' Market in Northern California, for instance, you can find in-season peonies, irises, and ranunculus from Marc Kessler and Julia Keener's farm, California Organic Flowers.

While buying flowers raised nearby has the obvious benefits of minimizing your carbon footprint and strengthening your community's economy, other payoffs are the freshness, vitality, and wider selection of unusual blooms to choose from.

Shopping at conventional grocers and florists, you'll note

year-round options like gerbera daisies, gladiolus, and long-stemmed roses; these are bred for longevity and durability. But because local growers don't have to worry about whether their goods will survive days crammed into a box on a jet, they can cultivate a dizzying array of seasonal beauties—like delicate hellebores, Queen Anne's lace, berrylike rose hips, fluffy snowball viburnum, and fragrant sweet peas. "We try to include a 'wow' element in every bouquet," Marc says. "People love smelling a tuberose for the first time or discovering that ornamental peppers or hibiscus pods are gorgeous floral ingredients."

Farm-raised blooms look whimsical and just-gathered, with flowers a lot like what your gardener friends might plant in their own backyards—only better, since growers have perfected their art. Diane Szukovathy (pictured, second and fourth photos from left) nurtures blooms on Jello Mold Farm in Mt. Vernon, Washington, with husband Dennis Westphall. "Flower farmers have an heirloom body of knowledge that comes from understanding what varieties grow best in their region and in each season," she says.



FLOWERS ARE PLANTED



PICKED AT THEIR PEAK



SORTED AND PACKED UP

## Find local blooms

**Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers** ([ascfg.org](http://ascfg.org)): Click on "Growers" and search by variety to find growers in your region.

**California Cut Flower Commission** ([ccfc.org](http://ccfc.org)): Select "Flower Lovers" and then "Meet a Farmer" to find a directory of flower farmers in California. Some sell directly to the consumer, while others may refer you to a retail source.

**Local Harvest** ([localharvest.org](http://localharvest.org)): Search an online directory of farmers' markets, CSA farms, and organic farms coast to coast. You can search by product or region to find local growers.

**California Organic Flowers** ([californiaorganicflowers.com](http://californiaorganicflowers.com)): If you can't find a flower farmer nearby, you can order from this organic farm in California (which is closer than another continent).

And like shoppers anticipating heirloom tomatoes and perfect peaches from nearby growers, flower fans can barely wait for their favorite crops to come into season. Kevin Larkin says mass-market florists weren't interested in the dahlias he and his wife, Karen Zydner, grow at Corralitos Gardens in California's Santa Cruz County. But thanks to an eye-popping palette and an increasing number of seasonal flower shoppers, his dahlias lure a steady stream of regional customers from June through October, who help themselves at his self-serve roadside stand in Corralitos. "Now, I can sell every stem I grow," Kevin says.

Local flowers aren't any more expensive. Neighborhood farms might have higher overhead costs than international ones, but they don't have the expense of excess packaging or shipping. Kevin, who sells bunches for \$5, says, "With local flowers, people get a good value for what they're buying." ■

Debra Prinzing is the author and David E. Perry is the photographer of *The 50 Mile Bouquet* (\$18; St. Lynn's Press), due out in April.



DELIVERED



TO THE MARKET

FAR RIGHT, FROM TOP: DAVE KING/GETTY IMAGES; KIMBERLEY NAVABPOUR (2)

## RETHINK THE VALENTINE'S DAY ROSE

The majority of cut roses you see now aren't in season and probably came from far away. This year, give a bouquet of these instead.



**TO SOMEONE WHO LOVES ROMANTIC HUES** give **anemones**, with velvety petals in red, pink, purple, or white.



**TO A FRAGRANCE LOVER** give **Tazetta daffodils** (aka narcissus), which have highly scented flowers.



**TO THOSE WHO CAN'T WAIT TILL SPRING** give **tulips**, which are often grown in local greenhouses for early bloom now.

## OR...

If you still yearn for roses, ask your florist to order from Peterkort Roses ([peterkortroses.com](http://peterkortroses.com)), the last family-owned cut-rose farm in Oregon.