



Photos by JOEL KOYAMA • jkoyama@startribune.com  
Robin Trott, right, and her daughter Joanna cut flowers at their Prairie Garden Farm in Starbuck, Minn. Robin and her husband, Doug, grow and sell about 100 varieties of flowers. They deliver them, in a refrigerated truck, to florists in the surrounding area and the Twin Cities.

# Blossoming CLOSE TO HOME

By KIM PALMER • kpalmer@startribune.com

**H**ot weather is hard on growing flowers — and hard on flower growers. Last week, when temperatures hit 100 degrees, Robin Trott, co-owner of Prairie Garden Farm in Starbuck, Minn., spent about four hours every day, drenched in sweat, hose in hand, watering fields of blooms.

She forced herself to take her time by singing waltzes in her head. “It slows me down,” she said. “If I rush, the flowers pay.”

The flowers need to look their best because they’re Trott’s livelihood. Every week, Prairie Garden Farm delivers its freshly cut flowers, in a refrigerated van, to florists in west central Minnesota and the Twin Cities.

“It’s a challenge to be a flower farmer up here,” said Doug Trott, Robin’s husband and farming partner. “It’s a short growing season, but during the season, things work really well.”

Mom-and-pop flower growers like the Trotts are a rare breed, even in an agricultural state like Minnesota. These days, most of the bouquets and bunches sold in florist shops, discount chains and grocery stores come from South America, where the growing season is long and labor is cheap. There’s a small but growing push toward locally grown, seasonal blooms — much as the locavore movement raised awareness of locally grown, seasonal food.

Flowers continues on E10 ►

## MAKE THIS ECO-FRIENDLY BOUQUET

• 4 lime green, locally grown hydrangeas • 5 pink and cream ‘Esperance’ roses • 2 gray-green sprays of dusty miller foliage • 3 dahlias • 6 burgundy ti leaves • 10 variegated blades of lily grass

From “The 50 Mile Bouquet,” by Debra Prinzing, photo by David E. Perry



Shades of Light, Worlds Away  
Mary McDonald chevron  
stripe table lamp, \$372 at  
www.shadesoflight.com,  
and Worlds Away zebra  
print wastebasket, \$135 at  
www.amazon.com.

## Zigzag zing

• Trendy chevron stripes  
add zip to summer decor.

By TERRI SAPIENZA  
Washington Post

Looking for a way to spruce up your spaces this summer? Try playing with pattern.

Besides paint, injecting a peppy print into a room is one of the easiest ways to make what’s old look new (or new-ish) again.

A classic favorite is the chevron stripe. This chic zigzag packs more punch than the traditional linear stripe, plus it adds movement and, depending on how you use it, a bit of playfulness to a space.

For a subtle chevron sighting, toss a throw on a sofa, place a bowl or lamp on a tabletop, or replace a nondescript wastebasket with one that’s worth noting.

If you’re prepared for more permanence, consider installing wood flooring, a kitchen backsplash or bathroom tile in the pattern.

Some happy mediums between the two extremes: hanging curtain panels that sport the graphic design (the wider the zigzag, the more dramatic) or painting floors or walls using a V-shape stencil.

The chevron motif is often confused with the herringbone pattern, but there is a distinction: the chevron is a series of V’s where the ends meet at a center point; in a herringbone pattern, the ends of the V’s overlap.

Finding a zigzag that works with your decor should be easy; chevrons are everywhere these days. From interior design to tech accessories, paper products to haute couture, when it comes to this pattern, the choices are aplenty.

If you’re not typically a pattern person, here’s a suggestion: Try the chevron on your feet first with a colorful pair of wedges. I guarantee you will notice a spring in your summertime step. □



Jane Merdan of Classic Bouquets in Avon, Minn., has been growing and selling flowers for 15 years.



Robin Trott cut Indian Summer rudbeckia at Prairie Garden Farm in Starbuck, Minn.

# Blossoming CLOSE TO HOME



DAVID E. PERRY  
From “The 50 Mile Bouquet”

## ◀ FLOWERS FROM E1

### ‘Slow flowers’

“It’s a harder sell than local food,” admitted Debra Prinzing, the Seattle-based author of “The 50 Mile Bouquet,” a new book that celebrates the “slow flower” movement, small local growers and eco-friendly floral designers. Some publishers weren’t interested in the topic, she said. “A lot of the reaction was, ‘We’re not putting [flowers] in our mouths — why should we care?’ But we’re touching them, bringing them into our home. Wouldn’t you rather be touching things that haven’t been sprayed with toxic chemicals?”

Prinzing was inspired by “Flower Confidential,” the 2007 bestseller by Amy Stewart that offered a behind-the-scenes look at the global floral industry. After reading it, Prinzing felt “outrage — that something as beautiful as flowers had such serious implications for the environment and the people who grew them,” she said. So she and photographer David Perry decided to travel across the country “to put a face on the flower farmers and tell their story.”

Many small flower farmers are struggling to compete at a time when big chain stores are buying in bulk from growers all over the globe, driving prices down. “Local farms that are trying to pay a living wage are at a disadvantage,” Prinzing said.

Yet locally grown flowers have much to offer, she said. They’re more fragrant and last longer than flowers that have been grown on another continent, then shipped to the United States and distributed to chain stores coast to coast before ending up in a vase.

Even roses shipped from California have a much longer vase life than roses shipped from other countries, said Dick Weber, owner of Weber’s Westdale Flower Home & Garden in Minnetonka, who buys his roses from the West Coast.

“There are very few rose growers left in the U.S. because the South American product is cheaper,” he said.

That imported rose bouquet may be less expensive but it will probably last for just a few days, vs. up to two weeks for a domestic bouquet, he said. “The longevity is noticeable. For us, buying domestically is a big deal, keeping the business in the United States.” He also buys from smaller, local growers, including the Trotts.

Locally grown flowers were part of the plan when Sue Mishow and Jodi Wilkens opened Enchanted Floral & Gifts in Sartell, Minn., early this year.

“We decided from the beginning we wanted to grow as many as possible, and to promote other local growers,” Mishow said. “With the economy the way it is, everyone is thinking ‘Keep it local.’ We’re dealing with local people, and if we can help them, they help us. Right now, in the summer, with things blooming, it’s been just about all local suppliers.”



Photos by JOEL KOYAMA • jkoyama@startribune.com  
Oriental lilies, dianthus, stock and snapdragons bloom in a high tunnel at Prairie Garden Farm in Starbuck, Minn., a flower farm owned and operated by Doug and Robin Trott. Growing flowers in Minnesota is a challenge because of the short growing season, Doug said. “But during the season, things work really well.”

### Savor the season

Rather than demanding all types of flowers, all the time, consumers can enjoy flowers in a more eco-friendly way by savoring those that are in season, according to Prinzing. We’ve gotten used to having whatever we want, whenever we want it, but there’s a cost, she said.

“I applaud Martha Stewart. She has elevated flowers, and she loves peonies. But now brides tear out magazine pages of peonies, and it’s October. You can find them in October, but they’re \$15 a stem, shipped from New Zealand, and you’ll be holding your breath hoping the petals stay on the stems for the ceremony,” Prinzing said. “If you really want a peony bouquet, get married when peonies are in bloom. The economy is going to force people to go local and seasonal.”

Doug Trott has seen increased bridal demand for locally grown lisianthus, a semi-hardy perennial that comes in a variety of colors. “It’s beautiful, and very popular for weddings,” he said. And some green-minded brides are now seeking out eco-friendly floral designers, who take the wedding color palette and source locally grown flowers that can fill the bill, Prinzing said.

But Weber, for one, thinks local flowers will remain a low priority for most brides. “If a bride is wearing a \$3,000 wedding dress, she’s going to want the flowers she wants,” he said. “We buy from local growers what we can, when we can. But if people want

certain things, we have to get it.” Most weddings require large quantities and guaranteed supply, which are hard for small local growers to deliver, he said.

### Culture shift?

Even if you’re not planning a wedding, there are lots of other, smaller ways to enjoy flowers in a more sustainable way, according to Prinzing.

If you don’t grow flowers, plant some. “You don’t have to have a cutting garden. Just tuck in a few annuals,” she said. Your veggies will reward you for it. “We’ve gone so heavily into edibles that some people think of flowers as frivolous. But you need nectar sources near food.”

If you already do grow flowers, cut some to enjoy inside rather than buying an imported bouquet. “Gardeners hesitate to cut,” Prinzing said. “Give yourself permission to be a floral designer — gardeners are the best floral designers.”

Even when nothing’s blooming, other garden elements make attractive bouquets, Prinzing said. “It’s hard to be local in December, but there are evergreens and twigs. Even seed pods — there’s a cool architectural element when you put them in a vase.”

And when you do buy flowers, seek out seasonal blooms grown close to home, she said. “There’s a growing category of people trying to be intentional about what they consume. They don’t want a huge carbon footprint. It’s a bit of a culture shift.”

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## the dirt

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