



Take the Slow Flowers Challenge

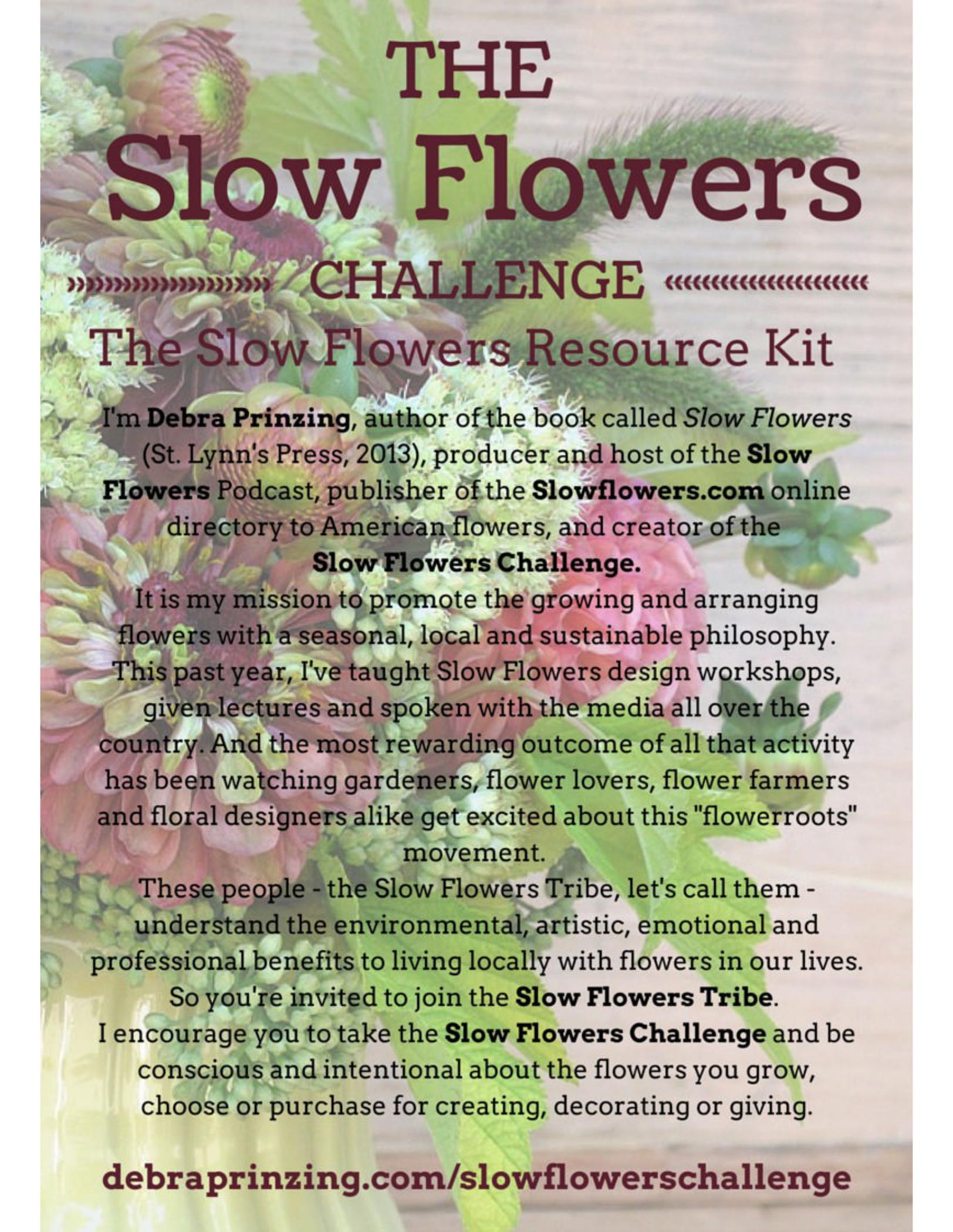
2015

seasonal

local

sustainable

www.debraprinzing.com



THE Slow Flowers

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The Slow Flowers Resource Kit

I'm **Debra Prinzing**, author of the book called *Slow Flowers* (St. Lynn's Press, 2013), producer and host of the **Slow Flowers** Podcast, publisher of the **Slowflowers.com** online directory to American flowers, and creator of the **Slow Flowers Challenge**.

It is my mission to promote the growing and arranging flowers with a seasonal, local and sustainable philosophy. This past year, I've taught Slow Flowers design workshops, given lectures and spoken with the media all over the country. And the most rewarding outcome of all that activity has been watching gardeners, flower lovers, flower farmers and floral designers alike get excited about this "flowerroots" movement.

These people - the Slow Flowers Tribe, let's call them - understand the environmental, artistic, emotional and professional benefits to living locally with flowers in our lives.

So you're invited to join the **Slow Flowers Tribe**. I encourage you to take the **Slow Flowers Challenge** and be conscious and intentional about the flowers you grow, choose or purchase for creating, decorating or giving.

debraprinzing.com/slowflowerschallenge



"Live in the season. Source flowers locally. Use earth-friendly materials and supplies."

--Debra Prinzing

Slow Flowers Challenge Resource Guide



What: The **Slow Flowers Challenge** is an ongoing practice of creating seasonal arrangements and sharing your designs with the **Slow Flowers Tribe**.

Why: The practice is timeless. The gesture is universal. Inspired by the exquisite beauty of a garden or by the sentiment of a special occasion, we gather flowers, foliage and branches, placing their stems in a vessel to display in our homes or give to another. Floral design is a three-dimensional art form that blends horticulture and nature with sculptural composition. At its best, bouquet making is a personal expression unique to the designer's tastes and point of view.

Behind the artistry there are some practicalities: Tools, supplies and techniques; an understanding of when plants grow and bloom; and an appreciation of color theory and the principles of design.

The more frequently you arrange flowers, the more familiar you'll become with each of these aspects.

I embarked on a 52-week exploration of design, from November 1, 2011 to October 31, 2012, during seasons both abundant and spare, relying on locally-grown elements from my garden, nearby farms and flower fields. Never was I disappointed by what I discovered and learned. I was rewarded by the results of my "slow flowers" odyssey.

I encourage you to give it a try and take your own creative journey with the Slow Flowers Challenge



When: The 2015 Challenge runs from January 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015. You can join at any time during the year.

How Often: The Challenge format allows you to participate at whatever frequency works for your schedule.

***I suggest these options:
365 Days or 52 Weeks
or 12 Months or 4 Seasons***

When I created the *Slow Flowers* book, I designed one bouquet per week for 52 weeks. But you might decide to create a monthly bouquet, or a seasonal arrangement - or, if you're really dedicated - a daily design! The main thing is that you decide what works for you.

Share! Post a photo of your arrangement to our [Slow Flowers Challenge Pinterest Page](#). Please use these hashtags so others can see what you've created:

***#slowflowerschallenge
#americangrown
#slowflowers***

***#originmatters
@myslowflowers***

We Have Resources to Help & Inspire You:

- **Receive** a weekly email with season-perfect **Slow Flowers Tips** for your cutting garden and personal floral design studio. Each will include what to plant now, what to harvest now, how to find seeds, plants or cut ingredients, and essential tools/supplies for the **Slow Flowers Challenge**.
- **Submit** photographs of your arrangements to our Monthly [Slow Flowers Challenge Pinterest Page](#).
- **Share** your designs on Social Media so others can see what you've created.
- **Win** prizes and the admiration of your fellow Slow Flowers Tribe members
- **Achieve** Certified Slow Flowers Designer status.



Getting Started

Harvesting How-To: I find it a cause of great joy to gather fresh flowers from your garden and bring them into my home -- and I know you do, too. And if you don't have a cutting garden or yard from which to clip, the next best thing is to source them from flower farmers near you.

Here are some of the techniques learned from my own flower harvesting, as well as advice from savvy flower farmers:

- Cut flowers early in the morning or late in the day when the weather is cool. In my area, I prefer to cut in the evening when the dew has dried from the flower heads and foliage.
- In most cases, you can select and cut flowers that are about half opened, ensuring that they will continue to “bloom” in the vase.
- Look for a little bit of the bloom color emerging from the bud tip. Some flowers, like dahlias, will not continue to open after being cut. You should experiment with one or two flowers before harvesting a major section of the garden.
- Use clean, sharp floral shears or pruners. Place cut flowers, leaf stems and branches into water immediately (making sure the bucket has first been scrubbed clean to slow the growth of bacteria).
- Once you bring flowers indoors, work in a cool, dry space. I like to work in my garage for these reasons: Even in the summer, it’s like a walk-in cooler. Plus, it’s close to the compost bin.
- Strip or cut the foliage from stems, paying particular attention to the portion that will be under water (it's nice to keep a few leaves close to the flower heads). Re-cut stems at a 45-degree angle, using a clean, sharp knife or shears. Place flowers up to their necks in room temperature water until you are ready to arrange.



Gather your ingredients:

- Each time you create an arrangement start with botanicals close to you. They might come from your garden, your patio, or branches and twigs that a windstorm has dropped onto your driveway. Simply take the pebble-in-the-pond

approach and begin with your own surroundings. Clipping from the neighbors' yards is totally acceptable - *but be sure to ask permission first!*

- You might choose to forage foliage, branches, vines and flowers from your neighborhood's wild places (you've heard that term "roadsidia," right?). Please do so responsibly. Do not clear-cut, and do be thoughtful about what you take.



- If you need more than what's readily available, here are some other tips: Houseplants like succulents, orchids or fancy Rex begonias are up for grabs. So are indoor-forced branches or bulbs like amaryllis or paper whites (especially useful in the winter months).
- Farmers' markets offer a great source of locally-grown flowers. Know your farmer; know your flowers.
- Grocery store flowers, but only if the origins are labeled. Ideally, you can find branding that shares where the flowers were grown and possibly which farm grew them.
- Wholesale markets in some cities offer public hours. They include Seattle Wholesale Growers Market, San Francisco Flower Mart, Los Angeles Flower Market, NYC's 28th Street Flower District and others. *PS, if you want me to add other wholesale markets that offer public hours, please let me know!*

Process your ingredients:

- Before arranging, lay out the stems, branches, vines and twigs and assess your collection of ingredients.

- Clean each piece by stripping away the lower section of foliage (approximately the portion that will be under the water level in your vase).
- Clip any broken, damaged or discolored parts. Re-cut the base of each stem at a 45-degree angle and place in a bucket of room temperature water to hydrate.
- **Note:** *you can hydrate for 1 hour up to 1 day, depending on your schedule. Always keep that bucket in a cool place, like a garage, covered porch or basement.*

Select your container/containers:

Selecting the vessel(s) is almost as fun as choosing your floral ingredients. While spending 52 weeks focused on bouquet-making, I also gained an education about the rich history of American



pottery. Highly collectible, the vases, urns and vessels that were manufactured between the 1930s and 1960s were originally not that expensive. They were rather humble, utilitarian pieces by makers like McCoy, Haeger, Bauer and Royal Copley – and other ceramics factories that didn't even add an identifying mark on the bottoms of their pieces.

Even today, it's relatively affordable to collect the vases that our grandmothers probably had on their shelves; depending on the quality and age, I've spent between \$10 and \$100 to bring one home. It's

so fitting to pair local and seasonal flowers with American-made pottery.

Other vase ideas:

- Shop flea markets, garage sales, thrift stores or procure hand-me-downs from relatives. Vintage is clearly "in" and I have invested less than \$10 to purchase some of my very best vases.
- For less than \$15 you can purchase a case of one dozen made-in-the-USA Ball canning jars – ideal vases for last-minute gift giving. In fact, I've trained my friends and neighbors to return their jars so I can reuse them for future bouquets.
- Flower pots, urns and planters may have a drainage hole, so convert them into an unexpected vase by inserting a jar or plastic container.



I work with uneven numbers (3 or 5, depending on the size of the vase). The arrangement looks more appealing if the stem lengths are varied in height.

Begin designing: There are "no rules" other than to design what pleases you. However, you may find these basic steps useful to create a successful bouquet.

First, choose the diva – an eye-catching, dramatic bloom with a symmetrical or dome-shaped form,

such as a rose, peony or dahlia. This will be the focal point of your bouquet.

Then select taller ingredients -- the backup singers to accent and support the main cluster of diva flowers (blooming, fruiting or foliage-laden branches are ideal). I consider these the arrangement's exclamation points.

Finally, gather softer elements that will drape over the edge of the vase, dripping like chandelier crystals.



Bouquet Elements to Consider

- **FOLIAGE/GREENERY:** Use foliage as a textural element to fill the opening of your vase and stabilize the stems added later.
- **FOCAL FLOWER:** The blooms that I call "diva" flowers are the leading stars of a bouquet. Look for varieties that convey to the viewer a distinct shape or form (they can be lushly feminine like a garden rose or strongly graphic like a dahlia. Even a sunflower with petals arranged around a bold center is a diva). **Note: In the winter, when flowers are quiet, the "divas" tend to be mostly green, even dramatic foliage. If you have flowers at all, they are fleeting but beautiful (hellebores, camellias, forced branches).*
- **LINES/VERTICAL:** Created with flowers, branches or foliage. The idea is to add Line and

Vertical elements as the design's 'exclamation point' to break up the texture of Diva Flowers.

- **SECONDARY/TEXTURES:** This is the embroidery -- the arrangement's lacy and ruffled accents. These tiny, dreamy blooms, herbs and perennials fill gaps and spaces between the Diva Flowers. [Note: I refuse to use the "F word" here - the term "filler" tends to devalue the unique characteristics of a textural flower].
- **SPILLERS/COLLARS:** Flowers, vines and foliage play the role of harmonizing the floral arrangement with the look and feel of your vessel. Romantic spiller ingredients drape and cascade over the rim of the vase. Collar ingredients are like a "ruff" that encircles the vase's opening and gives the arrangement a tailored, finished look.

Care and feeding of your arrangement:

There's a proliferation of advice for keeping a bouquet of floral ingredients fresh and lasting for many days. But one of the most important things you can do is give stems **clean water**.

With some arrangements, such as ones with the stems knit together in a tangle of chicken wire, try this easy water-changing trick:

- Place the entire arrangement in the kitchen sink.
- Gently lift the foliage at one edge of the vase so the faucet's spray nozzle is directed inside.
- Turn on the water and let it flow for a minute or two. The existing water will begin to overflow and go down the drain, displaced by fresh water that now occupies the vase (dry off the bottom and outside of the container when finished).
- Do this every day or two for the life of the arrangement.

Vase Life: Here is my answer to that inevitable question, "*How Long Will This Arrangement Last?*" I like to remember that local flowers will *always* have a longer vase life than imported flowers, ones that were cut 5 days ago and shipped to you via a jumbo jet to Miami; then trucked across country before ever arriving at the grocery store or wholesaler.

Many American consumers have come to expect a week or more from their flowers - and they think flowers are a "waste of money" if they don't last longer. Yet, we seem to be okay with deriving 45 minutes of pleasure from a meal at a "farm to table" restaurant or from a bottle of locally produced wine.



To that notion, I say: *Enjoy the fleeting beauty of your flowers.* They definitely last *waaaaay* longer than a meal or a bottle of wine. Vineyards, orchards, food farms and ranches are never asked to produce food or wine that satisfies for weeks, right? Ensure days of enjoyment by keeping the flower stems clean (re-cut tips every day or so, if needed), refreshed with clean water, displayed out of direct sunlight and away from an indoor heat source. Observe and enjoy all stages of your arrangement.



My obsession with using seasonal, locally grown floral elements might seem quaint to some, but there is a story behind the flowers that I hope resonates with anyone who embraces my **Slow Flowers** philosophy.

I believe we need to treasure and support the American flower farmer. These men and women, their families and employees, are passionate about the beautiful, fragrant, high quality fruits (or shall I say flowers?) of their labor; they work long hours to generate a living and they believe in land

stewardship. Most of us can get behind that idea.



According to a recent survey conducted by the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance, *65% of people who drive past a farm feel that they know the farmer.* Isn't that amazing? Whether or not we actually meet the individuals who cultivate farmland, we experience a sense of kinship when we see fields and meadows filled with their flowers and food crops.

Certainly, there's nothing more fulfilling than growing flowers in your own backyard. Yet constraints of time or space may leave you with empty vases, heading to the market to purchase something beautiful.

I urge you to consider the benefits of choosing local blooms – from their small “flower mile” to the growers’ earth-friendly practices. There are some who equate “buy local” marketing campaigns with giving one’s business to the hometown flower shop or chain store’s floral department. But that’s not enough – because unless that flower seller can assure you that the product came from a LOCAL grower, or at the very least an American farm, then sadly, there’s a big chance those flowers were imported.

Please ask. Join me and vote with your pocketbook. Being intentional with our choices might just save the American flower farm from extinction.