

Red, white and bloom

American Flowers Week local flower promotions sparkle



By Debra Prinzing

Slow Flowers Society launched American Flowers Week (AFW) in 2015 as a community-focused floral holiday, encouraging everyone in the floral marketplace to participate — from flower seed and bulb producers to cut flower growers; from designers to retailers; from cutting garden enthusiasts to artists.

As the original American-grown floral holiday, the campaign's goal is to stimulate interest in beauty, seasonality, local agriculture and sustainable floral design. (Details about the counterpart campaign in Canada can be found at www.canadianflowersweek.ca.) The timely importance of promoting seasonal and locally grown flowers is at its peak, especially given new findings around consumer behavior and attitudes relating to cut flower purchases. The 2021 National Gardening Survey of nearly 2,500 U.S. households found that 57 percent of respondents say it is very or somewhat important that the flowers they purchase are American-grown, while 58 percent of respondents say buying locally grown flowers is very or somewhat important.

American Flowers Week (June 28-July 4) is an all-inclusive, virtual promotion campaign designed to engage the public, policymakers and the media in a conversation about the origins of their flowers. As an advocacy effort, the campaign coincides with America's Independence Day on July 4th, providing florists, retailers, wholesalers and flower farmers a patriotic opportunity to promote American grown flowers.

American Flowers Week supporters can find more information and resources at americanflowersweek.com. Downloadable fact sheets, infographics, logos and social media badges are available for growers and florists to use for marketing and promotion efforts. Participants are encouraged to use the social media at @americanflowersweek to help spread the word about this campaign across all platforms.

Above left: An American Flowers Week pop-up flower bar by farmer-florist Whitney Muncy of Evansville, Indiana-based Emerald Design, at White Swan Coffee Lab. **Below left:** American Flowers Week branding on the flowers at the pop-up. Photos by Patton Photography.

The survey, sponsored in part by Slow Flowers Society, found that four in 10 U.S. adults (41 percent, 104.6 million) reported spending some amount of money on cut flowers in 2020, with an average household expenditure of \$62.63, or an estimated \$6.55 billion spent by U.S. households last year.

So how do flower farmers leverage marketing and branding opportunities during a patriotic buy local campaign that runs June 28 to July 4 each year? Creative ideas include retail and farmers market displays, direct-to-consumer and CSA programs, hands-on design workshops and artful collaborations with florists. Here is an overview of some of the inventive projects that took place earlier this year:

CSA bouquets

Slow Flowers' red-white-and-blue American Flowers Week bouquet labels are sold as a member benefit, giving farmers and florists a low-cost way to elevate their branding. Sage Devlin of Far Bungalow Farm in Leesburg, Virginia, used the labels as packaging for the farm's

June CSA bouquets and bulk flower bucket program. The farm's flowers move through a number of channels, including a Summer Bouquet Share program, sold for \$225 for 14 weeks of bouquets and the \$350 bucket program, which provides 50 stems weekly for 14 weeks. The farm also supplies a weekly flower share add-on to a large vegetable CSA and markets blooms through Old Dominion Flower Co-operative, an emerging wholesale collective of Virginia, Maryland and West Virginia flower farms that sells to florists and consumers.

Using the American Flowers Week bouquet labels "is kind of a

brilliant marketing scheme," Devlin says. "People see red, white and blue during this time of year and 'American' and they can get behind it." It's not important that the flowers are patriotic in color, Devlin says. "We do add a bunch of frosted explosion grass to suggest fireworks, though."

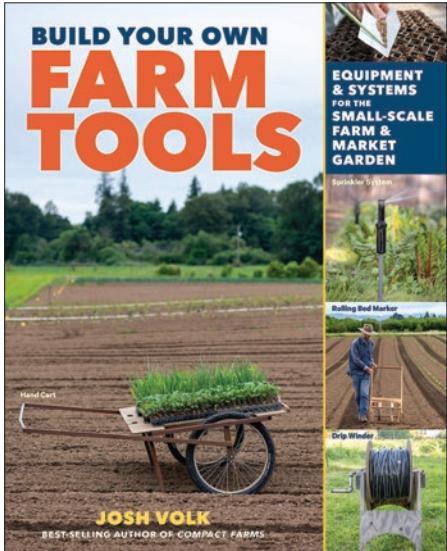
Farm to grocery partners

The 10-year-old Seattle Wholesale Growers Market, a farmer-owned hub for local and domestic flowers, added the American Flowers Week branding to wrapped bouquets and bunches sold through local grocery outlets during most of June and

up to July 4th. "We feature flowers in our mixed bouquets from multiple member farms," says Brad Siebe, general manager. Other farms use the labeling on their own bouquets and bunches supplied through SWGM. The collaboration elevates awareness for high quality, locally grown flowers, he explains.

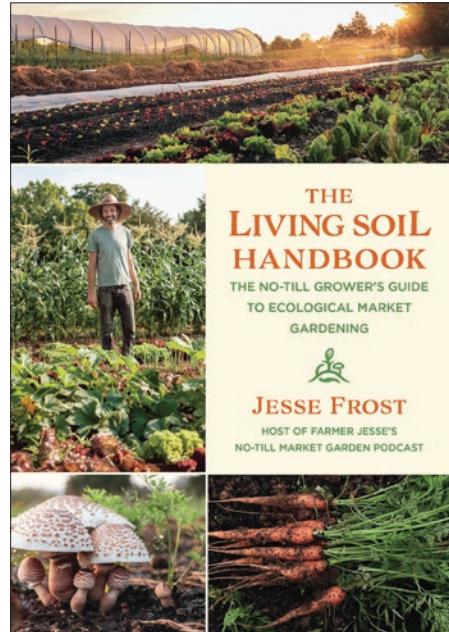
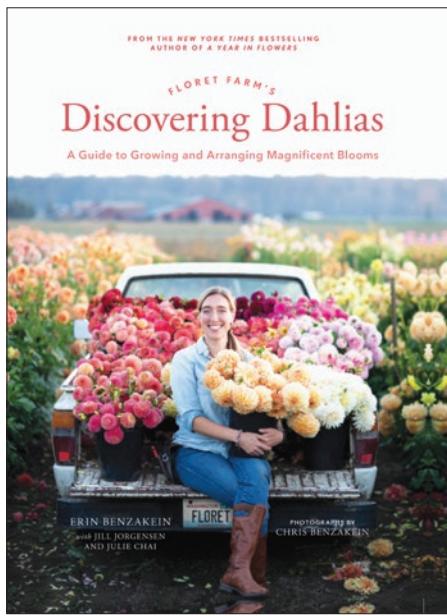
Among its regional grocery customers, SWGM sells to Town & Country Markets, a family owned neighborhood chain with six stores in the Seattle area. T&C Markets has participated in American Flowers Week for several years, spearheaded by floral category manager Melanie

Three new market farming books



Build Your Own Farm Tools by **Josh Volk** Read the review on p. 24. Our very own tools writer (see column on p. 18) offers an in-depth guide to building customized equipment that will save time and money and introduce much-needed efficiencies. Volk begins with the basics, such as setting up a workshop and understanding design, mechanical and materials principles, then presents plans for making 15 tools suited to small-farm tasks. Also discussed is design for farm efficiency, including effective drip irrigation systems and setting up spreadsheets for collecting important planning, planting, and market data. \$19.95 or \$15.96 for subscribers.

Discovering Dahlias: A guide to growing and arranging magnificent blooms by **Erin Benzakein** Floret Farm's Discovering Dahlias is a complete guide to cultivating one of the most popular and versatile flowers. There are sections on growing, harvesting, digging, dividing and storing tubers, plus more advanced topics like hybridizing and propagating your own varieties. There are also lots of ideas for what to do with your harvest, covering flower forms, varieties, and designing with dahlias. \$24.95 or \$19.96 for subscribers.



The Living Soil Handbook by **Jesse Frost** Read the excerpt on page 7. Discovering how to meet the soil's needs is the key task for every market farmer. In this comprehensive guide, Frost shares all he has learned through experience and experimentation with no-till practices on his home farm in Kentucky and from interviews and visits with highly successful market gardeners in his role as host of The No-Till Market Garden Podcast. \$29.95 or \$23.96 for subscribers.

We carry over 40 veg and flower farming books; for the rest of the selection, go to growingformarket.com. Subscribers always get 20% off the books we sell.

7th Annual American Flowers Week June 28 - July 4



CELEBRATE AMERICAN FARMERS & WASHINGTON FLOWERS!

Cherry. Each year since 2017, Cherry has commissioned special in-store signage for American Flowers Week and designed sales promotions, giving staff members and customers a great reason to highlight locally grown flowers.

She encourages floral department managers to build special American Flowers Week displays, with creative results. For 2021, Melanie asked the company's graphic artist to reinterpret a US state map (found as a free downloadable coloring sheet at americanflowersweek.com) into a full-color poster. Hillary Husted, the staff designer, rendered a beautiful map depicting each state flower as a botanical illustration, with the tagline "Celebrate American Flowers and Washington Growers."

In past years, T&C Markets has featured a "big board" sales special on local peonies and local sunflowers. "This year, we ran an in-store special on the SWGM bouquets for \$5 off, so we promoted \$20 bouquets for \$14.98 during American Flowers Week," Cherry says. "Our sales doubled the amount we sold from last year, and I consider it a success seeing local flowers in our customers' hands. I believe that this promotion will help flower sales all year long." Cherry and her department managers view the annual promotion as a success, one they also measure in sales data. "It's amazing how this has made the floral department relevant during the 4th of July week when everyone is here buying their barbecue supplies."

Consumer-direct DIY flowers

The flower farmers of Old Dominion Flower Cooperative, including Sage of Far Bungalow Farm, teamed up with one of their florist customers, Kelly Shore of Maryland-based The Floral Source, to package a curated



Left: The map depicting each state flower as a botanical illustration, created by Hillary Husted of Town & Country Markets. Right: An example of how the map was used to promote locally-grown flowers in the store. Photo by Joshua Hessler.

flower box during American Flowers Week. "This project gave ODFC and our growers an incredible opportunity to showcase what is growing here in the DC Region," says Megan Wakefield, director of operations. "We have so many incredible growers who are passionate about producing sustainably and lovingly grown blooms for local designers and the flower shops who purchase from our cooperative. The American Flowers Week project was our first foray into shipping our blooms and we couldn't have done it without the support and guidance of an industry leader like Kelly."

As a drop-ship, farm-to-florist wholesaler, Shore works with growers across the U.S. to help them sell directly to florists. Her unique program originally was developed as a COVID-pandemic pivot, and has since blossomed into a popular service with farmer-florists, DIY floral designers and retail florists who have trouble sourcing domestic flowers from conventional floral wholesalers. Shore's special American Grown at Home box of 50 summer blooms and greenery featured seasonal stems harvested from all of Old Dominion Flower Cooperative's 22 member farms. The box sold for \$150 (including overnight shipping) and included a decorative metal vase that customers used during The Floral Source's July 1st virtual workshop.

"As an advocate for local and American flowers and now a drop-ship wholesaler, it's a privilege and honor to bring national awareness and accessibility to the growers in my own backyard," Shore says. "Having the opportunity to highlight Old Dominion Flower Cooperative, such a progressive and passionate group of small growers, allows me to empower them and build confidence in my designer community. It's vitally important in the Slow Flowers Movement to know who is growing your flowers and have the reliance that the seasonal flora they grow will meet florists' needs. That strengthens the story behind the flowers, the farmers and gives our work deeper purpose."



Left: Bouquets from Titus Creek Flower Farm in Missouri with AFW branding. **Right:** The AFW theme was incorporated into Titus Creek's first-ever design workshop, held during AFW at a local wine bar. Priced at \$55, the event included a wine flight tasting and hands-on design instruction with Titus Creek blooms. Photos by Theresa Eads.

Coffee store pop-up

Farmer-florist Whitney Muncy of Evansville, Indiana-based Emerald Design, honored American Flowers Week

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by hosting a flower bar at White Swan Coffee Lab, a favorite neighborhood hangout. She promoted the event on social media with the message: "Support two local small businesses by purchasing coffee and flowers together." The event took place from 9 to 11 a.m., Friday, July 2nd, an ideal time for locals to stop by for coffee. "We had a table filled with locally grown flowers," Muncy says. "We invited people to arrange their own bouquets or ask me to design for them. Plus, we had grab-and-go vase arrangements, jars, and hand-tied bouquets for purchase."

In planning her first floral pop-up, Muncy decided it was less about profitability and more about marketing her upcoming summer CSA subscriptions to raise awareness about local, Indiana-grown flowers. She achieved all those goals. "We had an amazing response to our flower bar," she says. "My employee and I designed non-stop until the flowers were gone. I had no expectations going into it, but I know that we will be doing this again."

Instagram giveaway

To celebrate American Flowers Week in the Philadelphia area, Cassie Plummer, a farmer-florist from Jig-Bee Flower Farm in Philadelphia, ran an Instagram contest with flower giveaways for five winners. "To enter, people had to like our post, follow our Instagram account (@jig-bee) and our market account (@americanstreetflowermarket), comment on the post naming their favorite flower and finally, tag a friend who might be interested in local flowers," she explains. People who aren't active on Instagram were asked to enter by responding to Jig-Bee's newsletter with an email entry.

"The giveaways were actually a full bucket of flowers

with a mix of focal blooms, accent flowers and foliages," Plummer explains. "American Flowers Week is actually a slower sales week for us because it's right before the 4th of July holiday when everyone goes to the shore, so it was fun to put together the mixes of flowers for the winners — and we gained new information by reading the comments and learning our customers' favorite flowers."

Hands-on workshops

Jill Stidham of Titus Creek Flower Farm in La Plata, Missouri, grows more than 80 varieties of specialty cut flowers on a half-an-acre parcel of her 6-acre farm. She markets beautiful rose lilies that wow wholesale florists and also sells through two area farmers markets as well as through Titus Creek's online shop. In addition to using the American Flowers Week branding on wrapped market bouquets during the holiday, Jill incorporated the theme into her first design workshop, held June 29th at a local wine bar.

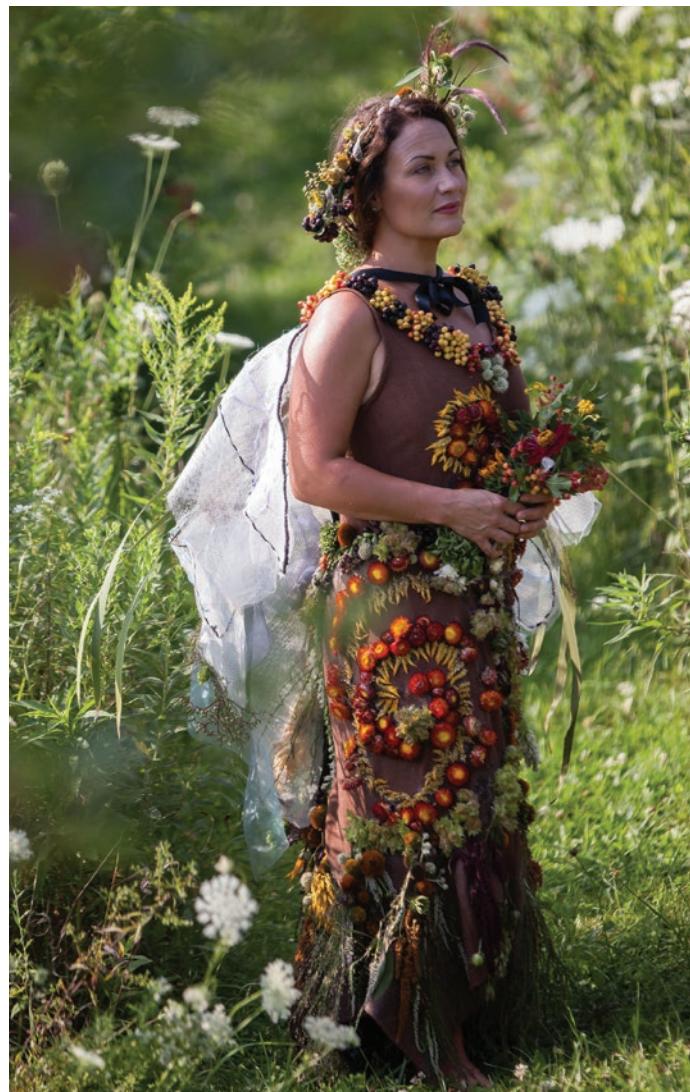
It was her first collaboration with Sip Downtown in Kirksville and she called the workshop "Flight and Farm Fresh Florals." Both businesses promoted the workshop through their respective newsletters. The evening included a wine flight tasting, plus hands-on design instruction, including Titus Creek's just-picked blooms priced at \$55 per person. "This was our first time, so we capped the event at 10 people, just so I could easily instruct them," Stidham explains. "But the shop can accommodate 80 people at a time, so there's room to grow floral events in the future."

The American Flowers Week promotion gives Stidham another reason to talk with both wholesale and retail customers about where flowers come from. "People in my area did not understand that flowers were coming from South America or Israel or Africa or wherever, transported in airplane cargo holds out of water. They never gave much of a thought to it."

Stidham knows that when people experience her locally grown flowers, they begin to notice the difference. She has plans to create more local flower experiences for those customers, with the addition of half an acre of lavender fields this summer for future agritourism. "When I've been designing what our farm is to become, I want to bring in as many different avenues as I can possibly manage."

Botanical couture collaboration

American Flowers Week's most visible promotion opportunity requires advance planning on the part of farmer-designer teams who collaborate in the annual botanical couture collection. Since 2016, Slow Flowers has invited member-teams to showcase iconic U.S.-grown blooms, fabricated into a garment, worn by a human model and photographed as if for a fashion magazine layout. To date, the series has included 25 ensembles featuring locally grown flowers across the United States and Alaska and Hawaii.



Erin Schneider's contribution to this year's Botanical Couture series. What is the point of this Botanical Couture series? Is it frivolous? Yes. Is it strategic? Yes. By presenting flowers as fashion, photographed with editorial styling to tell a story, the American Flowers Week campaign shines a light on the talented growers and designers who are part of the Slow Flowers Movement.

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Moreover, it changes what we think of flowers. No longer just a perishable item to capture a sentiment in time, perhaps the flowers, foliage, foraged botanicals, and natural elements you see in these pages will shift and expand your thinking. With flowers transformed as art or sculpture, as fashion and beauty, as a symbol of the human desire to connect with nature, there is much more to each bloom than one might imagine.

You can read about one dozen of this year's floral fashions in Slow Flowers Journal, a digital flipbook (search

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"free downloads" at americanflowersweek.com). One of the garments began its life at Erin Schneider's and Rob McClure's 60-acre Hilltop Community Farm in La Valle, Wisconsin. Schneider provides her wedding and event customers a wide range of blooms, including many familiar perennials and annuals, but she is most passionate about prairie and pollinator plants, as well as native varieties not often considered for floral design.

For American Flowers Week, she designed a botanical couture garment with Midwest prairie flowers and grasses, to encourage more of her

customers and the florists to share a similar appreciation. "The native plants I use in floral design and pollinator-friendly flowers are alluring to me," Erin explains. The whimsical dress used 39 species from the farm in swirl patterns that suggest a dragonfly's flight path and composite flower shapes. Peak-of-summer ingredients included goldenrod, Queen Anne's Lace, native sunflower, amaranth, Joe Pye weed, wild quinine (*Parthenium integrifolium*), rattlesnake master, vervain, celosia, and strawflowers. Aronia and Viburnum berries, plus other pods, were used as jewelry along

the neckline.

"Above all, I hoped to shed light on the value of local, sustainably grown flowers and the resulting collaboration between land and plants, flower farm, florist, and design team to offer beauty, style, and truly unique designs for our clients and customers — all while supporting the other life forms making these flowers possible," she says.

Debra Prinzing is a Seattle-based author of Slow Flowers and creator of slowflowers.com.