

[Passions]

CULTIVATING *a Dream*

LEARN HOW THIS DEDICATED FLOWER FARMER GREW HER BEAUTIFUL, INSPIRING BUSINESS.

By Toniko Reed
Photography by Chris Benzakein



[Botanical]

Imagine giving up everything you've ever known, moving to the Skagit Valley of Washington state, and your survival depends on your ability to farm and till the land. That's exactly what Erin Benzakein and her family set out to do, as they desired a simpler, more sustainable life.

"Farming is hard work and so is running and growing a flower business," Erin says. "Taking your passion and turning it into something that not only can sustain itself one day, but also can generate a profit to pay you is no easy task."

PLANT THE SEEDS

"When I delivered my first sweet pea bouquet, the recipient teared up as she buried her face in the flowers. After seeing all the tears, smiles, joy and memories evoked by my flowers, I knew I had found my calling," Erin says. And she started Floret Farms, a floral, family-run research and education farm.

FINALLY BLOOMING

Erin researched and developed the Floret seed line after seeing that some of the best cut-flower varieties "are not widely available unless you're willing to wade through obscure catalogs organized by Latin names or spend a lot of money on bulk seeds." So Erin created a line of 50 to 100 types of seeds of many varieties.

The Floret
Farmer-
Florist

Collective, which helps people find local flowers quickly and easily, grew out of a countrywide demand for Floret's flowers. "Plus, shipping our blooms went against my philosophy that the freshest, most beautiful flowers are those that are grown locally and not flown in from afar," Erin says.

OUT OF THE WEEDS

Even as a professional farmer-florist, Erin confesses that she isn't perfect. "I still overwater plants, accidentally run over rows with the tractor while mowing, or 'misplace' trays of seedlings only to find them totally dried up and dead in the corner of the garage because I got distracted by a drop-in visitor."

The best piece of advice she ever received was to know that "you're going to kill a lot of plants." Erin and her gorgeous farm are proof that, despite obstacles, you can and will overcome. "Don't let [a mistake] get you down," she says. "Think of it as a rite of passage. Jot it down in your notes, learn from your mistake, and I promise you'll laugh about it someday sooner than you think." floretflowers.com. *lru*

