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HOW IT ALL BEGAN

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I don't recall making bouquets when I was little, and my family didn't tend to buy flowers. But for as long as I can remember, the young Montréaler in me always felt at one with nature. When I was 11, my father, Jean, and his girlfriend at the time, Patricia, decided to leave the Mile End neighborhood and its bustling underground music scene to settle in the Eastern Townships, about an hour and a half outside of Montréal. They had just bought the farm of my dreams: a beautiful hundred-year-old property with a big house and weathered wooden outbuildings.

At first, I only made it out there on weekends. On Sunday evenings, when the time came to head back to Montréal, I'd fill a small container with hay and put it in my backpack, in the same pocket as my bubble gum and my father's drawings. When I longed for the countryside during the week, I'd breathe in the scent of hay for just a moment.

The garden that Patricia and Jean set up behind the house that year was enchanting—I'd never seen so much abundance. Their vegetables and flowers all grew with such determination. To round off our little slice of paradise, we also brought

in pigs, chickens, and sheep. The memory is still crisp in my mind: I was so impressed by the infinite beauty of the living world and by the close relationship we had with nature. It was magical.

Many years later, in 2014, Floramama was born. I was all about organic farming and had just wrapped up a two-year intensive organic market gardening course at Les Jardins de la Grelinette when I realized that, for me, flowers were the obvious answer. It was as if they had chosen me. As I worked alongside them, day after day, I felt as though I was taming my inner femininity.

I didn't study floriculture or floristry. In fact, I only ever took two courses, each two days long, on farms in the United States during my first few years as a professional grower. So, in the year before I started my flower farm, I spent countless hours scouring the internet, trying to glean as much information as possible about growing cut flowers. I ordered the two or three books that had been published on the topic, adapting the content to fit small-scale, intensive ecological farming. In short, I read everything I could find on the subject.

Along the way, I also discovered the Slow Flowers movement. It was inspired by

the Slow Food movement, started in 1986 by Italian journalist Carlo Petrini, in response to the growing influence of “the fast life” and, more specifically, fast food. I admire Petrini’s bold form of resistance: to protest the launch of a new fast-food outlet in Rome, he handed out fresh, homemade pasta to fellow protesters and to passers-by.

Today, the Slow approach has expanded, encouraging us all to reduce our environmental impact, appreciate the simple things and, above all, establish a clear relationship between enjoyment, knowing where our products come from, and rural life. Of course, living by this Slow philosophy doesn’t mean doing things at a snail’s pace; instead, it’s about accomplishing them—and becoming accomplished—at the right speed. It’s about savoring time rather than counting it.

The philosophy behind the Slow Flowers movement dates back to 2007, when Amy Stewart published *Flower Confidential: The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful*. The book gives readers an in-depth look at the floral industry, which is far, very far, from eco-friendly. Later, American author Debra Prinzing contributed to the conversation with both her pen and green thumb when she published her 2014 book *Slow Flowers*. Her work helped create a wonderful flower-growing community in the United States and eventually around the world.

As a floriculturist, I’ve embraced the Slow Flowers ethos because it is my profound belief that we need to keep our basic needs in focus: to be welcomed and understood; to feel a sense of belonging to a community; and, most importantly, to love and be loved.

These needs can only be met when we take our time and nurture high-quality interpersonal relationships. Through this lens, I see planting, growing, and delivering flowers as a genuine act of love. That’s why I enjoy what I do—I get to celebrate delight, cultivate beauty, encourage reflection, and honor the ties that bind us.

We are a part of a powerful social movement that, to me, is quite logical and even visceral. It is a return to the land and to community, local supply chains, regenerative agriculture. All are links in an ecological chain that connects every living being. One by one, they are coming together, reaching more people every day. Living according to your values is, I believe, THE driver for change in the shift to a new societal model. That being said, it would be dishonest to romanticize the transition without naming one fundamental truth: not everyone has the same access to land, time, and the freedom to launch a business. They are opportunities that, although often presented as universal, remain largely dependent on privilege.

I also believe that our farm was successful, in part, because we took risks. My first few years running Floramama, before my friend Raphaëlle came on board as a business partner in 2017, were quite challenging. But I learned a lot from the experience, despite the fact that I was working alone and with few resources. Looking back, I realize that my passion, determination, and even naivety served as a powerful fuel in those early years.

Our story, Raphaëlle’s and mine, goes back to early childhood. I was six years old when she was born. Since our parents were



close friends, we spent one short year together until she and her mother moved back to France. During this time, Raphaëlle was like a little sister to me. I remember holding her in my arms as I rollerbladed from one end to the other of her mother's apartment. Or letting her nibble on a pound of butter as a snack!

Raphaëlle grew up in Lyon, where she studied entrepreneurship and eventually decided she wanted to spend some time in Quebec in the summer of 2016. We were happy to reunite, and she offered to help out on the farm for a few weeks. Soon, we realized that our strengths were perfectly complementary, as it became clear to Raphaëlle that she wanted to get involved with Floramama and settle in Quebec. Just a few months later, she'd packed her bags and was making the move to Frelighsburg with her two cats. This time, she'd be staying.

In 2018, after a year spent working in the field and brainstorming together, we shifted our company into a higher gear. We put Raphaëlle's expertise to good use in many ways, which included creating a solid business plan and securing financing to help the company grow. One of the things I'm most proud of is the fact that Floramama is 100% founded and operated by women.





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GARDENS BIG AND SMALL

With this book, I'm not looking to reinvent the wheel. But I did come to realize at one point that the Floramama model was unique in Quebec, and that the principles we'd put in place could guide anyone interested in growing flowers, whether in a tiny garden or a large space.

My primary goal in writing this book is to foster a bond between nature and people. I want to highlight the logic behind floriculture, because you don't need to memorize a ton of information to develop skills in agriculture, horticulture, or floriculture. The key is to understand and appreciate the living world and how ecosystems interact. Whether you are looking to grow flowers in your backyard, in a community garden plot, on an acre of land, or on a balcony, the underlying principles are always the same.

In the following pages, I've shared everything I know and love about cut flowers in the hopes that it will give you—or anyone who wants to start growing flowers (as a business or simply to add beauty to their everyday life)—the tools I would have needed from the beginning.

One of the most fascinating aspects of growing flowers is that a very small plot, or even just a few pots, has the potential to

provide an astounding number of flowers. Sometimes, you can get dozens of flowers from a single seed! At this point, it doesn't matter how much land you want to cultivate. You may not even have any growing space at all right now, but you can start building your dream as you read this book.

By telling my story and sharing what I've learned over the years, I also hope I can encourage people to let themselves do something unusual and unconventional, to trust themselves and be bold!

Too often, we create mental barriers when we ask ourselves, "Am I able to bring this idea to life?" rather than, "How am I going to accomplish it?" That's where I hope this book will help you.

I wish you great success as you venture into the wonderful world of cut flowers. The work is incredibly satisfying, and pouring your heart and soul into it is well worth the investment.

Chloé Roy, Frelighsburg, January 25, 2023





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TYPES OF FLOWERS

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In your garden, you can opt to grow perennials, biennials, annuals, or a mix of all three. What's important is that you consider your needs, what your plants require, your geographical location, and how soon you hope to harvest your first crops.





Generally speaking, if you're looking to produce a large number of bouquets quickly in one season, you should prioritize annuals. They grow fast and without much of an investment. To make floral arrangements for weddings, it's best to go with both annuals and a few perennials, which offer unique colors, textures, and shapes that will add an elegant touch to your bouquets.

But watch out—beauty isn't the only factor to consider. Your flowers must also have a good vase life. That's why it's essential that you look into which varieties have this attribute, or make sure to run tests before growing them at scale.

All the plants featured in this book are currently grown on our farm or have been in the past. We selected them because they have significant ornamental value, are easy to grow, and have a lengthy vase life.



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CLASSIFICATION



An annual, according to the botanical definition, is a plant that goes through its entire life cycle (germination, growth, flowering, fruiting, seed production, and death) within one year. Perennials, on the other hand, can live for many years and bloom repeatedly over the course of their lifetime.

However, these definitions do not account for climate zones. Typically, a grower's horticultural perspective is based on their own latitude; so any plant that dies over the winter is deemed an annual, and any plant that survives the winter is a perennial (except biennials, which have a two-year life cycle). In reality, many plants described here as annuals are in fact perennials in their native climate. That means the major plant categories presented in the following pages reflect Floramama's northern setting (near the 45th parallel) and our own horticultural vocabulary. In this book, I've therefore used the term "annual" to refer to any plant that cannot survive our local winters.





ANNUALS

One-year life cycle

Spring: germination
 Summer: flowering
 Autumn: seed production
 Winter: death

In Floramama's early days, working with a shoestring budget, I turned to annual flowers, as I could harvest them in the first year of planting while still keeping investments to a minimum. It was heartbreaking to turn my back on perennials for multiple years in a row, but it was simply too expensive to get them set up. As a company, we were looking to hit certain growth targets and that required focusing on annuals.

In horticulture, annuals planted in northern environments are selected for their ability to grow fast, providing abundant blooms or lush foliage in between the spring and fall frosts. They provide short-term harvests.

TYPES OF ANNUAL FLOWERS

Annuals That Prefer Cool Temperatures

Annual plants in this category grow best when the weather is cool, and tend to become depleted when it is quite hot out. The advantage with these plants is that seedlings can be transplanted early in the spring, as soon as the risk of frost has passed.

My favorites: Bachelor's Button, Honeywort, Orlaya.

Highly Cold-Tolerant Annuals

Annuals in this category are so hardy that they can withstand a light frost. Many can be direct sown outdoors in the spring, as soon as the soil is workable, and some can be sown in the fall.

My favorites: Bupleurum, Dara (Daucus), Delphinium, False Queen Anne's Lace (*Ammi majus* and *Ammi visnaga*), Ornamental Kale, Snapdragon, Sweet Peas, Sweet William.

Annuals That Prefer Hot Weather

Most annual plants in this category will stop growing altogether if temperatures get too cool.

My favorites: Celosia, Jewels of Opar, Sunflower, Zinnia.

Perennials Grown as Annuals

At the farm, we treat certain perennials (see page 46) like annuals. When you harvest them consistently, as we do, the plants become depleted and won't provide good yields in the following year.

My favorites: Lily, Swamp Milkweed.





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TRAITS OF CERTAIN ANNUALS

Volunteer Plants

Some annuals are self-sowing. They germinate in the spring from seeds that fell to the ground during the previous fall—if you allowed them to go to seed, of course. Personally, I find this sight both fascinating and deeply moving, every time. For the purposes of our flower farm, however, we don't use volunteer seedlings because germination can be spotty, making it hard to plan effectively. And because volunteer plants are scattered across a given space, you can't use a hoe to efficiently weed around them, as you would with straight rows and even spacing. Lastly, we stay away from volunteer flowers because we can't control when they bloom.

Still, these plants might be of interest in your own garden, if you stick to one simple rule: thin out volunteers. Seeds from a single plant tend to all drop in the same place, or at least within a relatively small radius. This means you need to thin out the seedlings after they germinate, once they have one or two sets of true leaves. Spare just one or two volunteer plants, leaving an appropriate distance between them. You may also choose to dig up a few volunteers and transplant them into another part of your garden. On the other hand, if you don't want to keep any of the volunteer seedlings, you can just use a hoe to get rid of them while they are still in the cotyledon stage.

Most volunteer plants are quite easy to keep in check, meaning they won't take over your plot, so there's no reason to deprive yourself of these gorgeous varieties.

My favorites: Amaranth, Bupleurum, Corn Cockle, Cosmos, Chinese Forget-Me-Nots, Flowering Tobacco, Godetia (Clarkia), Love-in-a-Mist, Love-in-a-Puff, Marigold, Orlaya, Pincushion.

Cut-and-Come-Again Plants

With some of our annual varieties, a single plant can be harvested multiple times (the more we pick them, the more new stems they produce!).

My favorites: Bachelor's Button, Bee Balm, Chinese Forget-Me-Not, Cosmos, Corn Cockle, Craspedia, Dahlia, False Queen Anne's Lace, Flowering Tobacco, Godetia (Clarkia), Honeywort, Jewels of Opar, Lace Flower, Marigold, Mignonette, Pincushion, Snapdragon (if pinched), Statice, Sunflower (branching varieties), Sweet Pea, Sweet William, Zinnia.

Single-Harvest Plants

Some annuals provide only a single harvest (one stem = one bloom). When planning your season and all your bouquets, keeping this in mind is crucial because it will have a significant impact on yields.

My favorites: Bupleurum, Eucalyptus, Lisianthus, Ornamental Kale, Snapdragon (no pinching), Stock, Sunflower (single-stem varieties).

PROS AND CONS OF GROWING ANNUALS

Pros

- Can be planted and harvested in the same season
- Seed cost is minimal
- With most cultivars, you can sow multiple successions (and therefore get several harvests) within a single season
- A broad range of cultivars and colors are available
- Crops are easy to care for
- You can test out different cultivars, allowing you to select your favorites without spending too much money or monopolizing garden space
- Plants can be replaced every year

Cons

- Seeds need to be purchased year after year
- Seed shortages can happen
- Seedlings have to be grown and transplanted every year





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