

Sweet Pea Varieties; Sowing for Summer; Cut Flower Webinars



Crop culture and commentary for fresh-cut flower growers

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# BLOOM BEAT

Crop culture and commentary for fresh-cut flower growers

### COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- Sweet Pea Primer Part 2
- Spencer Sweet Peas
- What to Sow Now ...
- ... and Crops to Wait On
- Two Cut Flower Webinars!
- Flowers and "Duchenne" Smiles
- In Closing ...

2026 Cut Flower Brochure

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## Welcome to Bloom Beat #2!

Hello everyone, and welcome back! Tater and I are winding down from Valentine's Day (we had some crops time well for the holiday!) and are gearing up for the last of the spring ranunculus plantings.

Speak of spring, March 1 marks the start of meteorological spring for the northern hemisphere—time for all of us to gear up for the upcoming season. With that being said, let's talk shop!



## Sweet pea primer part 2

In part two of the sweet pea primer, we are going to talk about some of the different sweet pea series that are on the market and how we use them to extend our season,

Sweet peas are a satisfying crop to grow because flower initiation is based on daylength, which means they are a touch easier to anticipate and are a touch more predictable. Some crops, such as anemone and ranunculus, the dynamic duos of spring, aren't nearly as transparent with their flowering.

Tater and I grow three different series of sweet peas: Winter Sunshine, Spring Sunshine and the Spencer series. The beauty of these three series is that flower bud initiation starts at different daylengths. Sowing different series of sweet pea serves as a great way to extend the season on

your crop.



Tater admires our first cutting of Winter Sunshine sweet peas.

We start our season with Winter Sunshine. This is the premier early-season sweet pea series. The vines start flower initiation when days reach ten hours in length. These are the earliest flowering sweet peas we have. We start seeing flowers in late February and early March. The color palette is somewhat limited, with just a handful available, including white, blue, deep purple, and a few pinks.

I highly recommend Winter Sunshine Opal for growers forcing sweet pea in high tunnels. She's a delicate pink with rock-star stem length. Opal is one of the longest-stemmed varieties that we grow and the color compliments wedding work very well. Even though the colors in the Winter

Sunshine series are limited, they are still a great way to get earlier sweet peas to your customer base.



**Winter Sunshine Opal on the vine.**

In my experience, Winter Sunshine starts out shorter-stemmed and then produces longer stems after the first flowers are harvested. At the first sign of higher temperatures the vines start to fade. Although they aren't around for more than a handful of weeks, the premium we receive for having the earliest local sweet peas make them worth putting into our rotation. And if you are a sweet pea fanatic like me, you want as many sweet peas in your life as possible. I recommend trying them in the tunnel, especially if you are a northern grower.

Spring Sunshine sweet peas are another favorite at the farm. Spring Sunshine is a close cousin

to Winter Sunshine but a bit later to bloom, starting flower initiation when days are eleven hours in length. The timings are pretty similar between the two series, although Spring Sunshine starts flowering a touch later and flowers later into the season than Winter Sunshine. Oftentimes we are harvesting them during the thick of the Spencer sweet pea harvest (more on Spencer in a bit).

Spring Sunshine also has a limited color range, but Champagne, Blush and Peach are truly sights to behold. Tater and I cater to event planners and florists, and these are must-have colors for early-season weddings. Spring Sunshine Peach has great stem length and is one of our hottest sellers. Her stems stay long throughout the season and it is often one of the last vines we remove. I consider Spring Sunshine Peach to be one of the most productive vines we have on the farm. The seed can be difficult to find since she's such a strong performer. Be sure to check with your suppliers early and get your order in as soon as you can.

## **Spencer sweet peas**

Sweet peas are one of the crops we built our reputation on at Forget Me Not, and for us, the Winter Sunshine and Spring Sunshine series help get our customers excited for our Spencer sweet peas, which flower later in the season. These are the sweet peas you see plastered all over Instagram; they come in a wide range of colors and are considered the staple series when it comes to sweet peas.



**Assorted Spencer sweet peas.**

Spencer peas start flower initiation when days are twelve hours long. They are our last group of vines to flower, and we grow more Spencer peas than Winter Sunshine or Spring Sunshine. Their comprehensive color range appeals to a wide audience. Colors range from the softest creams, blushes and peaches for wedding work to the bright pinks, deep plums, blues and speckled varieties for retail sales at flower shops. There is a Spencer sweet pea for everyone—if you haven't found one that speaks to you, you need to look harder! There are so many breathtaking colors and variations but we are only going to cover a few that perform really well at the farm.

One of the most novel flavors of sweet pea is Spencer Blue Shift. If you want to set yourself apart in your market, grow this one. Blue Shift starts as a purple flower, and as she ages she slowly transitions to an electric blue. It's the only flower we sell, other than delphinium, that achieves

this Crayola-blue color. In my experience, the stem length on Blue Shift can be hit or miss. But blue is a beloved color so Blue Shift is an easy sell.

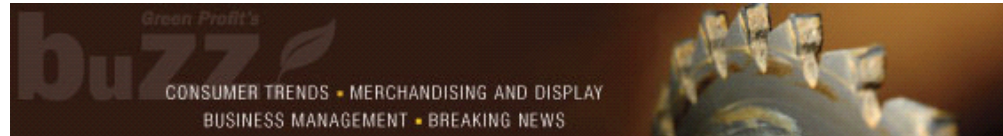
Another great variety for retail sales is Raspberry Flake. Let me say this now—you'll either love her or hate her. I personally enjoy how every stem of Raspberry Flake is different. The complex color pattern of cream and raspberry mottling on each petal is truly a sight to behold. As I mentioned before, she's not for everyone, but Tater and I have a soft spot for her.



**Spencers on the vine.**

Last but not least, my all-time favorite sweet pea on the farm is Alison Louise. Sweet pea breeder extraordinaire Rodger Parsons named her after his wife (how romantic!). I may have mentioned it before, but I really like blue flowers. Alison Louise is a unique bright periwinkle color.

Another variety that comes to close to the same coloring is Chris Harrod, but I find that Alison Louise has slightly longer stems and errs on the brighter side. Both are great, but I adore Alison Louise just a touch more.



## What to sow now: delphinium, foxglove

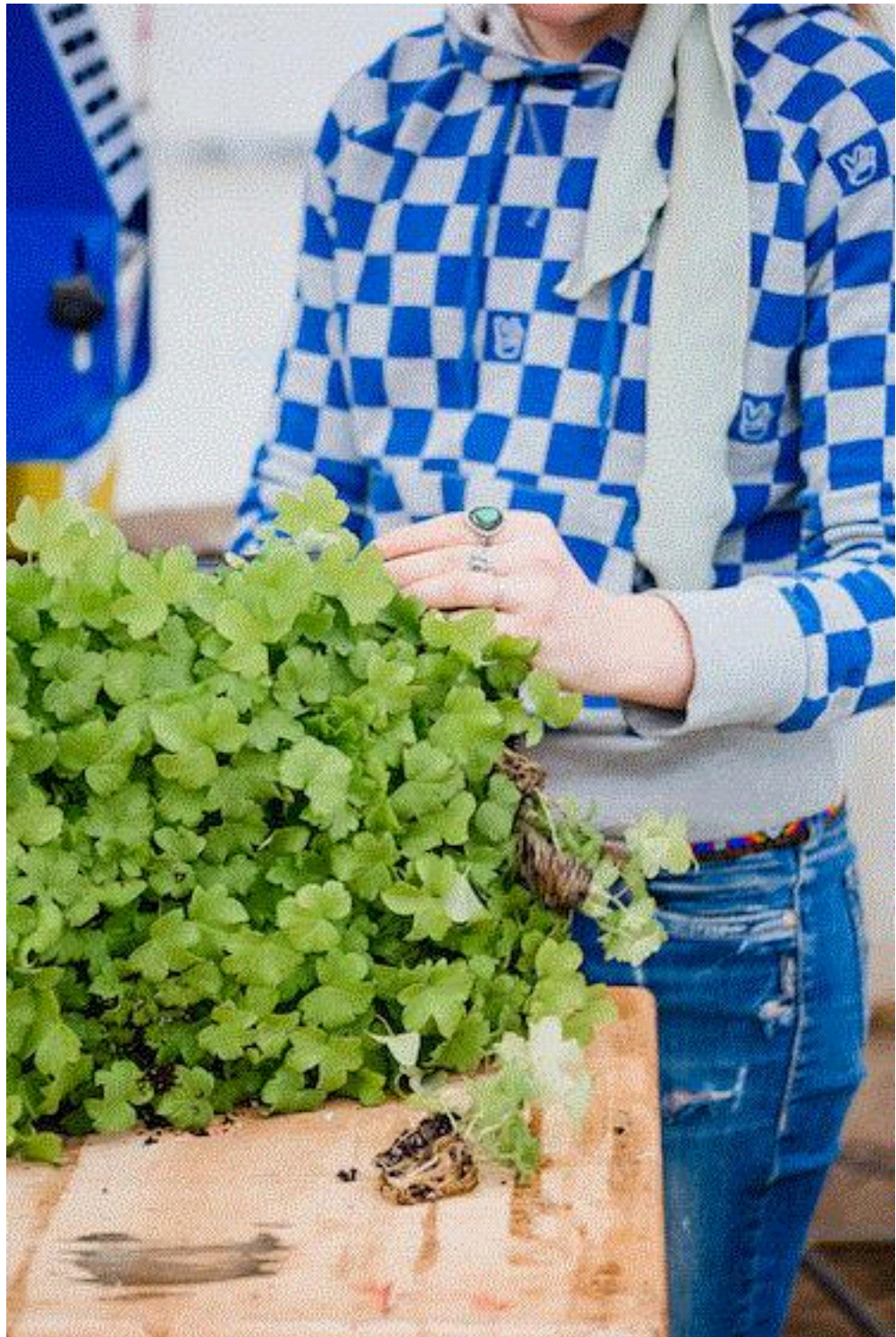
Check your calendar and your frost-free date, as it may be time to start sowing *some* of your summer flowers. But don't get carried away, as only a few types of flowers need to be started this early for field production.

If you farm in a northern climate like Tater and me (Michigan), it's getting time to start foxglove and delphinium if you want them to flower the first year. Delphinium and foxglove are staple items for a flower farm and they command a high premium. I like to start a batch of foxglove and delphinium approximately 8 to 10 weeks before the frost-free date. If you haven't ordered your foxglove or delphinium seeds, you will want to do that ASAP!

Tater and I like to plant these beauties as soon as the threat of frost passes. The soil at our farm is sandy loam, so most springs we don't have to wait too long to work the field. But if you grow in a heavier soil you may want to delay a week or so. I have found that the extra time the plants gets to spend in the field in the spring yields awesome dividends in the fall—we get stronger stems from a bigger plant. That is how can you get bigger foxglove and delphinium—give them as much of the season as you can to grow and establish. Not only will your first harvest be better, your plants will also overwinter better.

If you are looking for foxglove flowers the first year, be sure to order a first-year-flowering variety such as Camelot Cream or Dalmatian Peach. There are plenty of other breathtaking foxglove varieties as well, but they don't flower the first year. Foxglove is considered a biennial, meaning the plant needs two seasons to complete its lifecycle (aka flower). But Camelot Cream and Dalmatian Peach are exceptions. The more harvests you get off your plants, the better the return on your investment, and I give both of these varieties a 10 out of 10.

Our favorite delphinium series on the farm is Guardian. It's one I learned to grow early on and she's pretty reliable. [Let me know](#) if you have grown other exceptional varieties of delphinium. Tater and I would love to check them out!



Healthy Gardian Blue delphinium plugs.

Bear in mind, delphinium and foxglove seeds are more expensive than your other crops, such as sunflower seeds. So, if you think you might be tight on time in the spring to transplant your plugs in a timely fashion you may want to wait. There were seasons I didn't get my foxglove and delphinium started until June. That's not ideal for a fall cut flower, but you can still get some stems. But delphinium is my favorite late summer cut, so I make it a priority to sow that as soon as I can. What can I say, I'm a sucker for blue flowers!

### **Crops to wait on: summer staples**

When it comes to your summer staples such as celosia, sunflowers and zinnias, sit on your

hands! If you are still in the thick of winter like us northern folks, wait a few more weeks. Plug production and successful soil blocking is an art. Young plants struggle and suffer if they are left in the plug trays too long. You don't want your plugs to be too mature before you have a spot to plant them. Sometimes sooner isn't always better. The summer annuals I mentioned above should be started four to six weeks before your last frost date for field production. If you are itching to sow something, try your hand at foxglove and delphinium as I mentioned above; start them eight to ten weeks before your last frost.



## Don't miss these cut flower webinars

If you are interested in new varieties (and who isn't?), you are in luck, as the folks at *GrowerTalks* are hosting not one but two webinars on new cut flowers—one from seed, and one from bulbs, cuttings and tissue culture. Mark your calendars, as these are going to be really good webinars you won't want to miss!

The first, **New Cut Flowers from Seed**, will be Wednesday, **March 16**, at 1 p.m. Eastern/noon Central/10 a.m. Pacific.

It will focus on new cut flowers from seed from Sakata Seeds, PanAmerican Seed, Syngenta Flowers, Takii, Sumika and other seed breeders and suppliers. Guests include cut flower specialists Dave Dowling, Andrew Lee and Jose Sanchez from Ball Seed (the webinar's sponsor), along with representatives from each of the participating seed companies. Crops to be covered include lisianthus, sunflowers, dianthus, asters, celosia and marigolds, among others.

It's good to see the new and improved varieties on the market—who knows, you might just find a last-minute stunner to add to your crop plan for the summer season.

The second, one week later, is **New Cut Flowers from Bulbs, Vegetative Cuttings & Tissue Culture**, scheduled for Wednesday, **March 23**, also at 1 p.m. Eastern/noon Central/10 a.m. Pacific.

This one will focus on new cut flowers grown from bulbs, vegetative cuttings and tissue culture from Ednie Flower Bulbs, Danziger and other popular vegetative suppliers. Guests include Ball Seed cut flower specialists Dave Dowling and Jose Sanchez, along with representatives from each of the participating plant companies. Dave Dowling is such a wealth of information—when you tune in be sure to have a pen and notepad ready to take notes! Some of the cut flower crops that will be covered include lilies, ranunculus, dahlias, peonies, scabiosa, veronicas, craspedia, cut mums and limonium.

Tater and I are really excited for this one! With all the buzz around cut flowers, I'm sure breeders are coming out with lots of new and improved varieties. Wouldn't you want to be the first in your area to know about them? Be sure to tune in!

Oh, both webinars will be hosted by my fearless newsletter leader, Chris Beytes, editor of *GrowerTalks/Green Profit* and *Acres Online*, and he assures me that means they will be fast-paced, informative and fun!

For more details, and to sign up, go to [www.growertalks.com/webinars](http://www.growertalks.com/webinars). Be sure to check out the other webinars *GrowerTalks* has to offer. There's an upcoming webinar on heuchera, too—give it a look!

## Proof flowers make people happy

*“For more than 5,000 years, people have cultivated flowers although there is no known reward for this costly behavior.”*

That quote comes from the abstract of a [research paper](#) that I will tell you about in a minute, but first, a few thoughts on that sentiment of “no known reward”:

New and seasoned farmers alike can all agree that farming is expensive. Yes, it can be profitable, but it takes quite a while to see the fruits of our labor on the bottom line. We take a ton of risk, gamble with nature and, with a little luck and a little skill, we get to experience some of the most breathtaking crops cultivated by mankind.

So why do we farm? I can only speak for Tater and myself: We farm because flowers are one of the only gifts you can give that brings happiness to everyone who receives them. Flowers reach across genders and generations. They convey the thoughts and feelings that words can't. If you are looking to make someone's day, a bouquet of fresh flowers is the way to go. Giving flowers is such a strong, thoughtful gesture. As for me and Tater, it's a privilege to play a humble part in making the world a better place in such a beautiful and profound way.

Now back to that [research paper](#): It's no surprise the sales of fresh cut flower and plants skyrocketed over the last two years (and counting). The pandemic has been a long emotional rollercoaster and some of us are still trying to get off of it. Which poses an interesting question: Why do people take refuge in flowers?

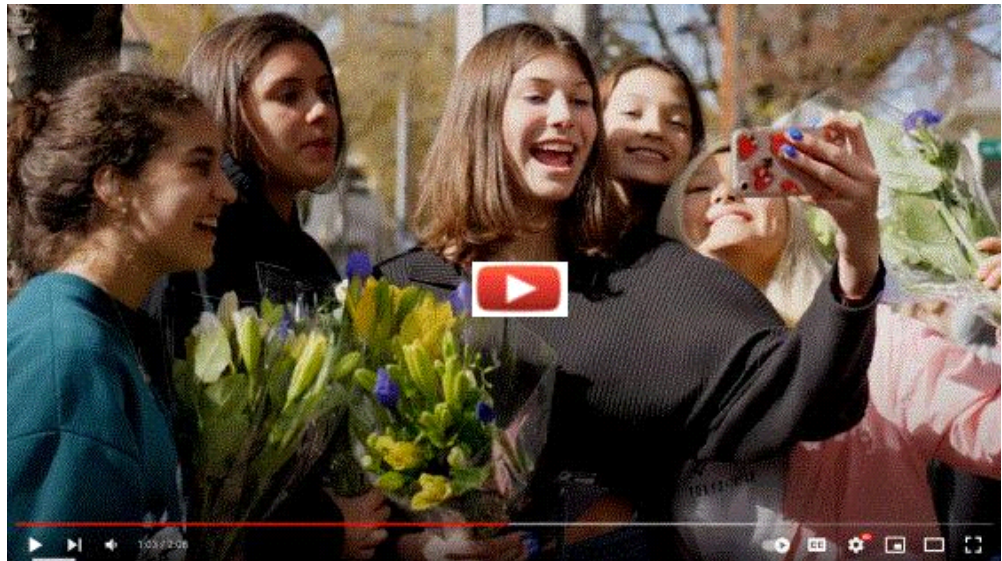
I did some Googling to see what research has been done on the positive emotional effects of fresh cut flowers. One of the most compelling studies I found was conducted by the State University of New Jersey and LaSalle University. It's from 2005, (odd to think that's 17 years ago now!) but their findings still hold true. They conducted three studies that showed that people smile (a “Duchenne,” or “true” smile!) when they receive flowers, and in some cases they still feel good three days later. Which poses another question: Why do flowers make people smile?

Some theories the researchers put forth include that it's a learned association, or possibly an evolutionary food association (flowers eventually lead to fruit and nuts), or that flowers are “super stimuli” that affect our mood through “multi-channel sensory interactions.” Or maybe, just maybe, just as plants attract insect for pollination, they attract us for other reasons—like to get a nice home in a vase on a kitchen table! For whatever reason people purchase flowers, the common thread is that flowers have a profound influence on how we feel.

As a farmer, I think it's important to understand how much you and your flowers impact the communities you serve. This road isn't for the faint of heart. But your work makes the world a better place in ways that you might not see. The ripple effect of giving flowers is powerful.

If you are looking for an interesting read, check it out [HERE](#). If you have any more interesting studies on how flowers influence people, send them our way (click my name at the bottom of the email to reply). Tater and I would love to read them!

## For more proof



I found the previous research piece through [SAF](#), the Society of American Florists. From their website comes more proof that flowers make folks smile: a 2019 [VIDEO](#) they produced promoting the stress-relieving power of flowers. In it, you'll see just what a Duchenne smile looks like!

### In closing ...

Thanks for reading! If you want to see more of what's going on at the farm, check out our [Instagram](#) @forgetmenotfarmsmi. And if there is a cut flower topic you'd like us to write about, drop Tater and me a line at [LDaschner@ballpublishing.com](mailto:LDaschner@ballpublishing.com).

Until next time,

*Lindsay* 

[Lindsay Daschner](#) (and Tater)  
Editor-at-Large—*Bloom Beat*  
Owner—Forget-Me-Not Farms

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