



Christin Geall in her Victoria, British Columbia, cutting garden. © Helene Cyr

# Creative Fulfillment

## Growing a floral-centric life on your own terms

On Vancouver Island, along the western edge of Canada, gardener, designer, writer and teacher **Christin Geall** grows flowers and shares her designs with the world through **Cultivated by Christin**, a creative studio launched in 2015.

Christin's eclectic background includes pursuits that are equal parts physical and intellectual. She apprenticed on a Martha's Vineyard herb farm, interned at the **Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew**, and homesteaded on a remote island in British Columbia. Academic studies in ethnobotany, environmental philosophy and a creative writing MFA led to editorial positions, university-level teaching and a regular gardening column for local newspapers.

Today, Christin's artistic focus centers around her urban flower farm-design studio in USDA Zone 8, the tiny hub of a multifaceted floral business.

"I have six 32-foot-long beds where I rotate flowers using West Coast-style succession planting," she explains. "There are

perennial borders as well, a small rose garden and a wild meadow in what was the front yard." A 32-foot-long arbor (under which meals and design workshops occur) and a greenhouse max out the remaining lot, just 10 minutes from Victoria, the provincial capital. "It's a wild and busy garden, but I'm truly trying to maximize production on a small piece of land."

Originally a salad-greens gardener, Christin fell into floristry and flower-growing after attending one of the first Floret workshops in 2014, "which really was like joining a cult or something," she jokes. "I signed up for Instagram that weekend and because I'd been a year-round salad gardener, I found many of the same horticultural techniques applied to cut flower production – both high-end, high-intensity growing. I easily adapted to this style of gardening."

As a Canadian grower, Christin starts a lot unique varieties from seed. "I've had to innovate as I can't buy many of the flowers I want on the island. That lack of conventional product

has challenged me creatively and perhaps made my designs interesting," she says. "Certainly it's a luxury to have a garden full of arching stems. With industrial product it's difficult to create the loose look that is in fashion at the moment."

Christin wanted to show wholesale floral customers what she was harvesting from her cutting garden and inspire more artful uses of her crops. "That led to me designing more," Christin says. "Not doing the armful-of-flowers shots for Instagram, but showing my own floral arrangements. I had to improve my photography skills."

Lush, abundant and wild arrangements of seasonal blooms fill Cultivated by Christin's Instagram feed and now attract workshop attendees and one-on-one students from around the world who want to study in her garden. "We pick all the flowers right then and there; they can choose the palette and just kind of go for it," she explains. "I don't pre-cut very much before they come. That opens their eyes to a new way of designing with what is available in the moment."



This fresh, spring compote arrangement, inspired by Christin's love of classic Baroque art, is an homage to seasonal flowers, crooked stems and the designer's fascination with color theory. © Christin Geall

Christin defines her floral style as "asymmetrical, with a Rococo sense of flow, floriferous with little use of foliage." She is drawn to 18th century art and architecture. "The Georgian period spans from the early Baroque with all its love of richness, to lighter styles and elegant Classicism. I suppose I love the era most because it was the great age of botanical discovery and artists and designers celebrated individual plants and individual flowers in art, gardens, and interiors."

Visually, I'm drawn to Cultivated by Christin's modern take on an old-world aesthetic, but what moves me more than see-



Christin Geall, photographed in her urban flower farm ©Helene Cyr

ing her flowers is reading the narratives that accompany those images. Recently, she had this to say on Instagram:

*"Creatives, in my opinion, are largely made, not born. Perhaps this means I'm no great talent (obv.), as for me the term 'creative discipline' means just that: you show up, you do the work. You put your butt in the chair or your eyes on the vase or camera; you paint until you can't rightly see and you educate yourself. That needn't sound heavy, didactic, narrow-framed. But it is work and some days it feels like it: the well is dry, ideas used up. Thankfully my garden changes, new flowers bloom, and I miss writing when I don't. . . ."*

*I appreciate people's kindness in suggesting I'm creative because I do admire the trait and I recognize fully the privilege I've had in developing that side of myself, but I also want to say simply that if you cultivate creativity it does grow. You just have to give it your attention."* ■

### Details:

Cultivated by Christin, [cultivatedbychristin.com](http://cultivatedbychristin.com), @cultivatedbychristin

**Upcoming workshop:** Foghar: A Collaborative Autumn Workshop at The Cambo Estate, Scotland, October 8-11, 2018.