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Slow Flowers
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A lush and seasonal floral arch features botanicals from Mountain Flower Farm

Botanical Sourcing

Designers are drawn to Vermont's beauty and R&R, with an education about domestic flowers.

Photos by Sarah Collier, Taken by Sarah

As more florists choose flowers and greenery from local and domestic farms, the shift in sourcing practices has stimulated countless conversations that begin with “Where can I find?,” “Who is growing?” and “What’s in bloom now?”

Those questions inform two wedding and event florists who’ve built their individual brands on local and seasonal sourcing. **Mary Kate Kinnane** of **The Local Bouquet** in Little Compton, R.I., and **Kelly Shore** of **Petals by the Shore** in Damascus, Md., are part of the Slow Flowers’ shift toward intentionally supporting domestic flower farms. The two frequently field questions from peers, and they willingly share insights, contacts and advice.

So it made sense to invite other designers to join their two-day visit to a favorite flower farm. Their September

workshop took place at **Mountain Flower Farm** in Warren, Vt., whose owner, **Walt Krukowski**, has supplied floral designers nationwide for more than two decades.

Attendees from Massachusetts, Maryland, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont joined Krukowski and other instructors at Mountain Flower Farm over two days in late September. The timing coincided with peak *Hydrangea* season, providing a sensory experience and ample “ingredients” for a seasonal design session of hand-tied bouquets and a foam-free floral wedding arch.

Surrounded by hundreds of flowering ornamental shrubs, perennials, annuals, vines and foliage plants, the group first gathered beneath a whimsical circus-style tent as Krukowski shared his farming journey, including how his growing practices deliver high-quality blooms to the floral

THIS PHOTO: Mountain Flower Farm.
RIGHT: Florists' Review contributor Alison Ellis harvests blooms.
BELOW: Mary Kate Kinnane (center) of The Local Bouquet leads a branding session.



BRANDING AND COMMUNICATION TIPS

- Share your story and your "why." "Even if you're able to use only 10 percent American-grown flowers, share that you are conscious about it and why it matters to you."
- Bring customers in on the experience. "Show who the farmer is, show behind-the-scenes of you in your studio, show what seasonality looks like in June, and then carry that through your brand."
- Organize your images by season, such as on Pinterest and on your website. For inspiration, check the seasonality boards of the flower farmers you follow.
- When you post on social media, say where the flowers came from and tag all of your sources. "I think our bridal clients appreciate how transparent we are with where we source from and what it took to get those flowers to the shop."
- More resources are available from The Local Bouquet, including details on the "Farmer/Florist Workshop Series" in 2020.

Source: *The Local Bouquet*
thelocalbouquet.com, @thelocalbouquet

marketplace. His insights helped professional florists to better understand everything from product pricing and handling to how to advocate about the benefits of seasonality with customers.

During her presentation, Shore walked attendees through her flower sourcing process from domestic farms, including those close to her in Maryland, as well as from growers who specialize in key crops like Mountain Flower Farm's peony, lilac and *Hydrangea* varieties, greenhouse growers in California, or foliage producers in Florida.

Kinnane introduced the many ways she bases her brand marketing efforts around local and American-grown flower sourcing, giving attendees tips on educating potential customers. Since starting The Local Bouquet in 2013, "We went right into designing 100 percent with American-grown flowers, and I think that has helped me stay true to our mission – because it has never been an option to fill in holes with imports," she says.

Kinnane believes studios and shops should constantly communicate their sourcing approach across all channels. "I try to consistently drive people to my website to read and learn about where my flowers come from first; then we talk about the wedding," she notes.

After the education sessions, Krukowski invited participants to harvest from his five acres of fields, and they selected stems from cultivated rows and foraged from the wilder edges of his property. Along with annuals purchased from Jessica Witcher of Understory Farm in Sudbury, Vt., the attendees reveled in the local and seasonal botanical options. They returned to Knoll Farm in Fayston, Vt., which housed and fed attendees, and spent the final afternoon there, creating bouquets that revealed the individual design aesthetic of each.

YEAR-LONG DOMESTIC SOURCING TIPS

- Sign up for every availability list you can for local growers and ones that ship.
- Communicate with your wholesaler that when you place orders you want everything American grown and if there is something that is not, you want to be given the option of choosing to accept it or not.
- Start a monthly log.
- Add farms' availability and pricing to the inventory/ordering section of your event planning software.
- More resources are available from Petals by the Shore, including details on floral sourcing workshops in 2020.

Source: *Petals by the Shore*
petalsbytheshore.com, @petalsbytheshore

BOTTOM: Bouquet design session with (from left) Kelly Shore, Alison Ellis and Blair Roberts Lynn.
BELOW: Flower farmer Walt Krukowski reviews attributes of seasonal *Hydrangea* varieties.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Stacey Lee of Paeonia Designs uses an EcoFresh Bouquet wrap for the foam-free arch; Model Erin Bennett poses with locally grown flowers and one of Knoll Farm's purebred Icelandic sheep; Participants also used "pillow" mechanics from Syndicate Sales; Blair Roberts Lynn designs with autumn flowers.



Led by Shore and Kinnane, the students collaborated on a lavish autumn floral arch, using many floral and foliage varieties sourced from Mountain Flower Farm. Once their creations were photographed, the bouquets became centerpieces for a final farm-to-table dinner, sponsored by **The Floral Reserve**, a Providence, R.I.-based wholesale flower market that highlights local and American-grown options.

For **Blair Roberts Lynn**, owner of **Sweet Blossoms** in Frederick, Md., the workshop fit her goals for innovating and diversifying her business practices. "Sourcing American-grown flowers is something that is becoming increasingly important to me," she explains. "It's important because I believe in shopping local, which helps to support not only local families but also local infrastructure. This type of sourcing is just one of the green practices I am employing throughout my business to be more sustainable."

The chance to experience Mountain Flower Farm was especially appealing to Lynn because she is already a farm customer. "I wanted to learn more about Walt and his farm. It's so much more informative to be able to see the product in person and to build personal connections with the farmers." ■



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