

Floret's Cut Flower Calendar

Erin Benzakein reveals how to design with the gorgeous blooms she grows.



In 2017, farmer-florist **Erin Benzakein** published *Cut Flower Garden*, her primer for growing a bounty of blooms in all four seasons. An instant bestseller and winner of an American Horticultural Society Book Award, the book engaged and inspired audiences who had never before considered growing their own flowers. It also helped to launch a popular new venture: the Floret Seeds collection, making available seeds of Benzakein's favorite flower cultivars in smaller packet quantities on par with the home gardener's needs.

Now, with *A Year in Flowers*, Benzakein shares her seasonal floral design approach – an accessible book version of the Floret workshops.

When she first started down the floral path more than a decade ago, it wasn't easy to gain the design training she yearned. She writes: "I didn't understand that in order to create natural-looking bouquets, I needed to master several key components: using the right supplies, having the right mix of ingredients and following a process when arranging. Unfortunately, this information was not widely known or accessible – if you didn't know someone who could teach you, the only way to figure it out was through frustrating trial and error."

Through lots of practice and study with other florists she admired, Benzakein began to thrive as a flower farmer who also designed beautiful arrangements. She soon was teaching small-scale organic flower farming and seasonally based floral design through in-person workshops and online courses.

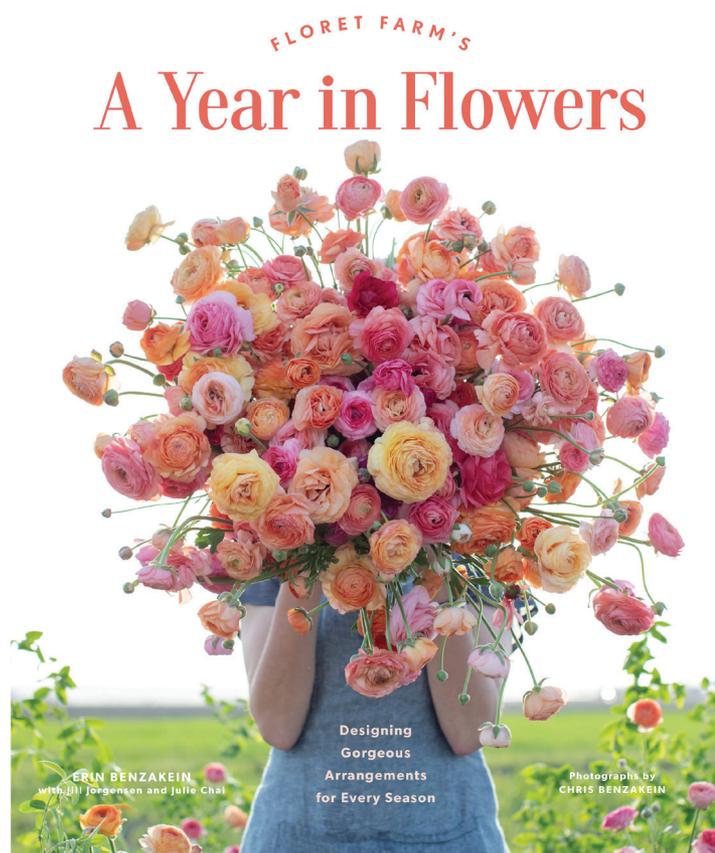
Benzakein writes that she discovered how nearly everyone struggles with the same things she once did when it comes to making bouquets: how to approach color, basic mechanics, proper ingredient selection and, most importantly, how to build confidence.

"From watching ... students learn how to create floral arrangements, we developed a tried-and-true, straightforward process that took away the guesswork and resulted in beautiful bouquets every time," she writes. "With a basic recipe to follow, students were finally able to relax and focus on cultivating their own personal style and to enjoy the seasonal ingredients they were working with."

We asked Erin Benzakein to talk about her new book and share some of her favorite images from *A Year in Flowers*, with photography by her husband **Chris Benzakein**.

Can you touch on how this new book is an extension of the *Cut Flower Garden* book?

My first book, *Cut Flower Garden*, was all about growing flowers. In it, you'll find easy-to-follow steps for planting, cultivating and harvesting more than 175 varieties of flowers including cottage-garden favorites, new hybrids and heirloom varieties that are central to today's seasonally focused floral designs. *A Year in Flowers* picks up where *Cut Flower Garden* left off and outlines everything you need to start making your own incredible arrangements, whether you're harvesting flowers from the backyard or sourcing ingredients from the local market. This book is heavily focused on design and offers easy-to-follow advice on flower care, material selection and essential design techniques, along with how-tos for



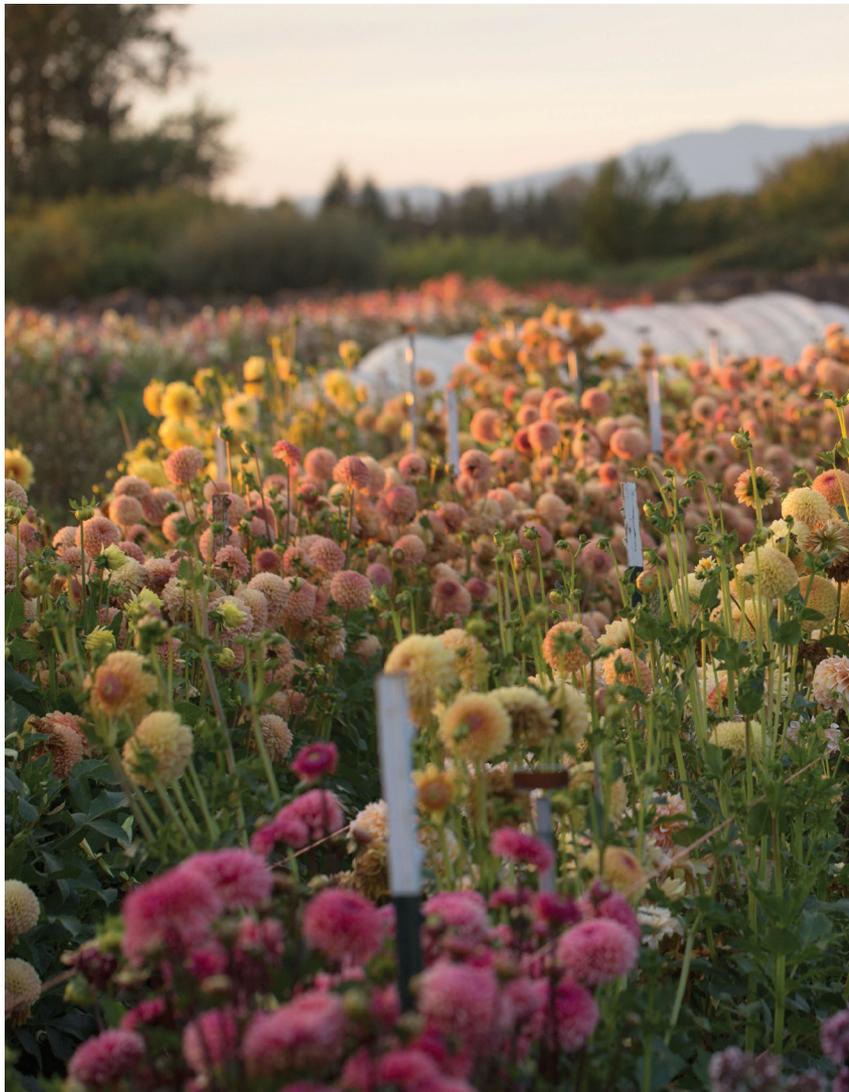
more than 25 seasonal arrangements – including magnificent centerpieces, giftable posies, festive wreaths, and breathtaking bridal bouquets.

You address both the professional and DIY designer. Are those two worlds coming closer together?

Absolutely! If you don't have design experience, don't let that stop you! I see floral design as a creative outlet and a way to connect more closely with the seasons. It isn't about right and wrong or a desire for perfection. If your design brings you joy and puts you more in touch with gorgeous local flowers and more in tune with nature, then that is a success, in my eyes.

Color theory is so important, and your section on color is fabulous. Can you touch on some valuable themes about color education that this section addresses in a unique way?

My arrangements celebrate the best of what is in season, and each bouquet captures a fleeting moment in time. In my designs, I aim to mimic the way plants grow in nature, to show off their inherent traits. I start every bouquet with a stroll through the garden, gathering blooms and foliage that catch my attention, and from there, my color palette begins to take shape. After years of teaching others natural floral design, what I find most useful is to understand the difference between warm and cool colors. Every color on the spectrum has warm





and cool versions. This is also true when it comes to foliage. I encourage others to think beyond green when it comes to foliage. Once you start working with what's seasonally available, you'll become aware of all the colors found in nature, which has its own spectrum of hues, including gold, copper, crimson, plum, frosty blue, gunmetal and even black. Over the course of the growing season, most plants will go through great changes, and these subtle shifts in colors make for the most magical arrangements. I also think it's important to understand the concept of layering, which is selecting flowers and foliage in a particular color range and using tints, tones and shades within that range. After mastering layering, color bridging is the next skill to learn, which is the process of marrying two colors that are farther apart on the spectrum. I demonstrate these concepts throughout *A Year in Flowers* in each seasonal chapter.

Is there anything else you want to mention?

A Year in Flowers is not just an invitation to incorporate local blooms into life's biggest milestones and everyday events; it's also a salute to the many dedicated farmers who work tirelessly to grow beautiful flowers for their local communities.

My goal for this book is that its message spreads far and wide, sending a powerful message to the media, booksellers and consumers that local flowers, and the people who grow them, matter. ■

DETAILS

Erin Benzakein, floretoflowers.com, @floretoflower
A Year in Flowers (Chronicle Books, 2020)
with Jill Jorgensen and Julia Chai;
photography by Chris Benzakein



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online:

<https://qrs.ly/zpb148u>