

The Gardener-Florist

Designer cutting garden becomes a unique partnership with bulb-and plant-seller.

Longfield Gardens sells flowering bulbs to everyone – from home gardeners who order tulip and narcissus bulbs and dahlia tubers via an online shop, to big-box stores who market bulk bags of bulbs via a private label program.

Engaging with floral designers and flower farmers is relatively new for the Lakewood, N.J.-based bulb-seller. According to **Kath LaLiberte**, a horticulture consultant working with Longfield Gardens, while targeting the home gardener is a priority, florists and small-scale flower farms represent an emerging category to which it's paying attention.

"Especially when certain varieties are in short supply, like this summer's 'Labyrinth' dahlia, flower farmers start looking around for who else is selling it – and that's often when they find us," she says. "Those flower farmers have been great because they're flooding Instagram and Pinterest with images, and their followers are saying 'I have to have that flower in my life, whether I grow it myself or buy it.'"

The timing was perfect when florist and flower blogger **Alicia Schwede** of **Flirty Fleurs** teamed up with Longfield Gardens a few years ago. Alicia and her husband had just purchased a new home in Arlington, a

semirural area located about 50 miles north of Seattle. With the house came her first-ever garden on a full acre of land and Alicia wanted to grow some flowers. "I'm a gardener-florist," she laughs. "I'm not a farmer. I don't want to do this every day. But I do like to grow and admire my flowers, and use them to make arrangements."

Her beginner's garden has swelled to more than 400 dahlias (up from 50 two years ago), romantic roses, late winter hellebores, "a ridiculous amount of hydrangeas," and as many unique foliages as possible, especially vines, including akebia, clematis, porcelain vine and honeysuckle.

While primarily a blogger and floral educator, Alicia hasn't

completely abandoned weddings. Through her design business, **Bella Fiori**, she periodically says yes to couples. "I do use my own dahlias for weddings, and I've found that growing them is a bonus. I needed white dahlias recently and nobody else had them but me."

The marriage of a florist who wants to grow flowers and an online plant retailer curious to see what floral designers would do with its varieties has led to the *Flirty Fleurs Collection* of spring-flowering bulbs, including tulip, narcissus and hyacinth. Longfield introduced Alicia's first selection last fall – a red-and-white-themed tulip





bouquet – and added three more designer options this year. Alicia planted, harvested and styled each arrangement, photographing the designs for Longfield’s online store.

To create the planting recipes, she pored over the Longfield website and selected specific flowers as inspiration. For example, the *Baroque Collection* began with a double orange and yellow tulip called “Double Gudoshnik,” while a double peach and white narcissus called “Delnashaugh” inspired her *Somerset Collection*. “I made a little layout so I could see how the colors and varieties looked together, and then I planted the bulbs in sections of my garden,” she says. With nearly 1,500 bulbs in her beds and borders. Alicia learned plenty about growing bulbs. “I now realize I have to look up the bloom times, since a few of the colors I had imagined putting together did not line up.”

Longfield, like most bulb companies, provides specific details on flower height as well as bloom time (early-, mid- or late-season), Kath points out. “I’m a big fan of having the earliest and latest blooming choices in your garden so you can have a longer tulip display.”

Both women hope that the Flirty Fleurs-Longfield collaboration will stimulate more flower lovers to try bulb growing.

“For us to have a designer niche and to brand Alicia’s selections as the *Flirty Fleurs Collection* is a way to get our name in front of her audience,” Kath says. “Those people might buy the collection or just use it as inspiration; they might just buy one variety or do variations on a theme. All we want to do is help more people grow more flowers.”

Alicia sees many advantages for florists wanting to grow their own small flower patch. “I think a lot of people are looking for something to set themselves apart. If we are all using the same channels in social media, and if we design with the same flowers and foliage supplied by the same wholesale sources, then it’s hard to differentiate one designer from another. Growing flower varieties that you can’t find through most wholesalers is one way to do that.” ■

Details:

Longfield Gardens: longfield-gardens.com

(search for the *Flirty Fleurs Collection*)

Longfield will ship fall-planted bulbs through mid-December while supplies last.

Flirty Fleurs: flirtyfleurs.com