



LOCAL TREASURE

Flower Shop Is at Heart of Popular Grocery Store

INDEPENDENTLY OWNED, BONNY DOON GARDEN CO. OPERATES INSIDE NEW LEAF COMMUNITY MARKET'S FLAGSHIP STORE IN SANTA CRUZ, CALIF.

By Debra Prinzing

Photography courtesy of Bonny Doon Garden Co.

Bonny Doon Garden Co. resides as a full-service floral department inside one of **New Leaf Community Markets'** four locations in California's Monterey Bay region. New Leaf Markets is the first grocery chain in California to achieve B-Corporation Certification, recognizing businesses that consider the impact of decisions on their workers, customers, suppliers, community and the environment.

For floral designer **Teresa Sabankaya**, owner of Bonny Doon Garden Co., these values resonate with her mission-driven model of growing and supplying local blooms for the people of Santa Cruz. "I think we're well on our way to redefining what a florist is," Sabankaya says. "It's one who would, ideally, grow some of his or her own greenery or who has an acre or so of blooms and sources materials from other local growers and domestic farms in the U.S."

Sabankaya began selling her garden's floral bounty to neighbors and friends in 2001, which later led to a

relationship with area New Leaf Markets. By 2003, she opened a sidewalk flower kiosk in downtown Santa Cruz, Calif., naming it Bonny Doon Garden Co. after the mountain hamlet that's home to her personal cutting garden nearby. For years, she harvested an abundance of heirloom roses, *Clematis* vines, aromatic herbs and ornamental shrubs such as lilacs and *Hydrangeas*, bringing them straight from her garden to her kiosk and, ultimately, to fill her customers' vases.

This old-fashioned approach to floristry always seemed natural to Sabankaya, despite what was happening elsewhere in the industry with an increasing reliance on imported flowers. "I wanted to take my homegrown flowers and create magnificent works of art," she explains. "I wanted my flowers to remind one of a beautiful garden, with movement, fragrance and romance," she recalls.

At the time, Sabankaya was a true pioneer of the yet-



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to-be-named “slow flowers” movement. She began to give local independent farms and flower growers a chance to shine, connecting her customers with more regionally grown flowers.

From Flower Kiosk to New Leaf’s Flagship Store

Sabankaya’s relationship with New Leaf Markets began before she opened her sidewalk kiosk. “I was just growing flowers at that point, and I had all these incredibly gorgeous Asiatic and Oriental lilies. I put them in a few five-gallon buckets and drove to New Leaf Markets, thinking, ‘I have this format, this way of growing flowers sustainably, without chemicals,’ and I knew New Leaf had that same mind-set. I introduced myself to the produce manager, and he bought all my buckets of flowers. He told me, ‘You just keep coming back whenever you have more because we’ll buy everything you grow.’”



When word circulated about New Leaf’s plans to build a “flagship” store on Santa Cruz’s Westside, she jokingly told regional manager **Rex Stewart**, “You need to open a full-service flower shop in the new store, and I’ll run it.” The idea took hold, and in 2009, Bonny Doon Garden Co.’s freestanding full-service independently-owned floral department opening coincided with the debut of the chain’s new Westside Santa Cruz outlet.



Sabankaya worked closely with New Leaf Markets’ management team and their architects to develop her approximately 400-square-foot store-within-a-store. She’s pleased with that collaboration and is mostly proud of persuading the team to locate flowers far away from produce. “For the longevity and life span of flowers, it’s not ideal to be near the produce department,” Sabankaya points out. “I fought for that point because it was super important to me.”

As a result, Bonny Doon Garden Co. is situated by the coffee bar and New Leaf’s “Bloom” department, which sells primarily cards and gift items. Like a tidy jewelry box, the flower shop has exterior-facing display shelves and a cash-wrap counter, behind which are a floral cooler and small production area that accommodates up to four designers. New Leaf Markets’ storefront is clad in tall glass windows, allowing just the right amount of natural light to brighten the floral department but not overheat buckets of flowers.

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"It all flows nicely," Sabankaya notes. "Customers start at produce, then they go to dairy or stop by the bakery area to grab bread ... and in order to reach the checkout register, they come by our flowers."

A Model for Grocery Floristry

Bonny Doon Garden Co. is a habitual stop for New Leaf Markets' customers, Sabankaya says. "We have people who purposefully stop by to get bouquets for their dinner tables. We also have impulse purchases. It's become an equal mix of regular customers and convenience shoppers."

The partnership between Bonny Doon Garden Co. and New Leaf is unique to the Westside Santa Cruz location, says **Amber Willis**, a New Leaf manager who has worked with Sabankaya for years.



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"Bonny Doon Garden Co. is definitely not your regular floral department," Willis says. "It's also different from what we offer at our other stores, where a lot of the floral [items] are from outside vendors. At the Westside New Leaf Market, where Bonny Doon Garden Co. operates as its own entity, it works well. The store offers higher-end options and floral items shoppers can't find anywhere else in town."

New Leaf Market's daily hours of operation are 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Bonny Doon Garden Co. operates from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. or 5 p.m., depending on the day of the week, so after-hours shoppers may select bouquets, bunches or floral-related accessories like soaps, candles and jewelry from local makers, and pay at New Leaf Markets' checkout aisle.

"It's the best-case scenario for Bonny Doon Garden Co. because if people come after 5 p.m., they can



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still get flowers," Sabankaya says. "The last thing we do each day is stock up on our bucket bouquets and grower bunches. When we come in, in the morning, eight or nine bucket bouquets and several grower bunches have sold – and we weren't even there."

Connecting Farm to Consumer

As a neighborhood store and a destination spot, New Leaf Markets attracts loyal and habitual shoppers, Willis explains. For Sabankaya, the idea of offering local flowers to people who are curious and committed to spending their dollars consciously is "such a valuable and important thing for a grocery store to have."

She continues, "I believe people are looking for something more than a typical grocery store bouquet. We hear all the time from customers, 'You stopped me in my tracks with your bouquets. I can't leave the store without one.' You can tell a corporate bouquet from a local farm's bouquet. I'm sorry, but you can. Our bouquets are very, very fresh because we just made them with flowers from local farms or from my garden."

Bucket bouquets, priced at \$17.95 and \$24.95, are designed in house by the same staff members who produce Bonny Doon Garden Co.'s full-service weddings and florals for local delivery, so customers know they are getting something special. The shop also offers \$9.95 grower bunches of the best seasonal blooms from local farms, such as *Zinnias* grown by students in the University of California Santa Cruz's sustainable agriculture program or *Delphiniums* straight from a regional flower farm. In addition to



harvesting from her personal cutting garden, Sabankaya maintains standing orders for locally-grown flowers from as many as eight area farms.

Laura Vollsett, of FieldSketch Farm, a Santa Cruz County grower, is one of those regular suppliers. She sends a weekly availability list to around 40 Bay Area florists but is especially happy to supply Bonny Doon Garden Co., located in her own community.

“It’s less travel time for me to supply Teresa. The product is a lot fresher, and it’s nice to be able to shoot her a quick text and say, ‘I can have this to you by the end of the day or tomorrow morning,’” Vollsett says. “Having someone who is genuinely invested and curious about what we’re doing has been really good for our farm.”

Sabankaya says one of her best-selling seasonal items is a garden rose bouquet of five to seven stems, for \$12.95. All of Bonny Doon Garden Co.’s bouquets are packaged in signature black-and-white French toile tissue lined with white butcher paper and sealed with the shop’s logo sticker. “It’s a presentation bouquet that you feel good about giving to someone,” she says.

Sabankaya recognizes the benefits of partnering with a top regional grocery chain. “There are a lot of successful independent brick-and-mortar flower shops, but what we also offer is convenience. Having a full-service flower shop in a grocery store? I can’t say enough good things about it. It’s a match made in heaven.” ■

DETAILS

Bonny Doon Garden Co.

bonnydoongarden.com, @bonnydoongarden

New Leaf Community Markets

newleaf.com, @newleafmarket

FieldSketch Farm: fieldsketchfarm.com, @fieldsketch_farm

1. Cash-and-carry-style displays make it easy for shoppers to pick up locally-grown bunches and bouquets at New Leaf Community Markets’ Westside Santa Cruz flagship store. Bonny Doon Garden Co.’s logo appears on signage, further branding the independent flower-shop-within-grocery-store.
2. Teresa Sabankaya of Bonny Doon Garden Co.
3. Seasonal hand-tied bouquets are wrapped in signature black-and-white tissue.
4. “Flower shop” display shelves and cabinetry wrap around the freestanding department, where floral accessories and potted orchids are offered in addition to floral bouquets.
5. Flower-related gifts, including candles and stationery, on display with succulents and orchids.
6. Bonny Doon Garden Co. uses point-of-purchase signage to educate customers and inform them about product sourcing from local farms.
7. “Presentation” bouquets are popular for the New Leaf Market customer heading to a dinner party.
8. Locals especially love supporting the sustainable farm at nearby University of California Santa Cruz, a point highlighted in Bonny Doon Garden Co.’s signage.



Debra Prinzing is a Seattle-based writer, speaker and leading advocate for American Grown Flowers. She is the producer of *slowflowers.com*. Each Wednesday, approximately 2,500 listeners tune into her “Slow Flowers Podcast,” available for free download at her website, *debraprinzing.com*, or on iTunes and via other podcast services. In 2016, GWA: The Association for Garden Communicators inducted her into its Hall of Fame. She is the author of 10 books, including *Slow Flowers* and *The 50 Mile Bouquet*.

