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Urban Roots

Farmer-florist grows design ingredients in a city garden where chickens roam freely.

Portraits by **Anna Peters, @annapeter_s**

Eleanor Blackford, owner of **Bash & Bloom**, an event and design studio, believes that her flourishing city lot is the secret ingredient to her success. Her studio and 1,000-square-foot cut flower patch are located in Seattle's South Beacon Hill neighborhood, where more than 100 varieties of flowers and foliage plants thrive. "We use these elements to personalize every project we work on," she says.

Blackford launched her studio in 2011 while working in the nonprofit and social work sector. "A friend asked me to design the flowers for her wedding and I was completely hooked," she says. It helps that her British-born mother and grandmother infused Blackford with a lifelong love of gardening and an aptitude for plant-tending.

The designer's lush, organic, romantic and a little wild aesthetic is based entirely on seasonality. With a nine-month gardening season, and with the farm-to-florist **Seattle Wholesale Growers Market** located just a few miles from her home, it's easy for Blackford to support her brand value of offering 100% domestic sourcing, "including as much locally grown as possible," she explains.

Since 2015, when she moved into her future husband's home, Blackford has supplemented her floral orders with her own-grown flowers. She has established annuals, perennials and flowering shrubs in parcels that edge the curbs and sidewalk, in raised beds that line the driveway, and an area along her front path. Grass no longer exists here, supplanted by seeds and bulbs. Five hens provide eggs for Blackford's small family, but they also dig up the soil, eat bugs and provide manure that doubles as fertilizer. "It's





basically a little urban farm. I go out and do farm chores. I do crop rotation and use no-till methods. I'm all organic," she maintains.

Blackford offers couples (and their wedding planners) an immersive experience where the flowers help define a mood or add impact through signature installations for their event. Known for her colorful design palette and garden-inspired aesthetic, Blackford tends to attract couples in search of an offbeat, whimsical look.

"My flowers are definitely a selling point for my clients," she says. "It's why some contact me in the first place, because they like the idea that I'll grow some of the flowers that will be used in their wedding."

Yet, there are weeks when Blackford doesn't have a need for the event-specific annuals and perennials she grows. "One of the things I really enjoy about growing is that other designers want my flowers, too," she points out. Blackford sells her extra harvest to florist friends, as well as on consignment at the Seattle Wholesale Growers Market, where her flowers are displayed alongside the blooms from Northwest area flower farms.

"This garden is a bonus, and if it makes money to pay for itself, then I'm happy. I save thousands of dollars over the course of the year, and I typically sell a couple thousand dollars worth of my flowers on top of that."

Her marketing is low-key, but effective. For example, earlier in the season Blackford harvested masses of white-blooming corn cockle (*Agrostemma* sp.), posted photos on her Instagram feed (@bashandbloom), and let her followers know she planned to deliver the flowers to the Market on the following day. More than 250 likes and several comments followed, and the flowers sold quickly.

The irony is that the patch of corn cockle had self-sown and re-bloomed after her 2018 planting, revealing Blackford's preferred style of "lazy gardening." "I like the garden to do the gardening for me," she jokes. As an entrepreneur and new mom, this less-intensive approach is paying off. "I'm switching to growing not the big, juicy blooms, but the other things that are unique and stand out; that add different texture to my bouquets and arrangements," Blackford says. "For example,

Blackford calls her floral concept "Woodland Magic," including a wedding ceremony arch and decor for a magnificent curved table in the woods. The event was planned by Wonderstruck Event Design for a wedding at Copper Creek, a historic lodge located outside the entrance of Mt. Rainier National Park in the Pacific Northwest. The images were widely posted, re-posted and shared on social media © Carly Bish.









cosmos and zinnia. Yes, they are often considered farmers' market flowers, but seeds are available for so many different varieties and I think they are so pretty."

Even when she designs with flowers from the Bash and Bloom cutting garden, Blackford is careful to price at the market rate. "I do not adjust my prices at all, because I don't want anyone to think that growing my own flowers cheapens my work. I treat my flowers as if I bought them from any other vendor."

Financial reasons aside, there are many benefits to growing flowers in her urban setting, Blackford adds. "It's really important to me, especially living in the city, to connect with the earth. To put a seed in the dirt and see it grow. I don't have to move out to the country to do this scale of flower growing, and I really like the diversity that this little farm provides. I like that I design weddings and I grow flowers. I don't want to have to grow for a ton of other people's weddings because then the creativity would disappear for me."

DETAILS

Bash and Bloom: bashandbloom.com,
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