



# WHERE FOOD MEETS FLOWERS



## Jim Martin, of Compost in My Shoe, integrates horticulture, farming and floristry.

Photos by **Libby Williams**

**B**ased in Charleston, S.C., **Jim Martin, EMC**, is a Renaissance man whose life in flowers is informed by horticulture, agriculture and art. Having named his business **Compost in My Shoe** after a popular gardening blog he started in 2011, Martin expanded to food and flower production while also studying and achieving **European Masters Certification** in 2018 and cofounding **Low Country Flower Growers**, a nonprofit collective of local flower farmers, in 2017.

In his “day job,” Martin is the **Charleston Parks Conservancy’s** director of horticulture. He and his partner, **David Vagasky**, live, grow and entertain at their home and one-acre property on Charleston’s James Island, where there is a lush Southern landscape as well as a production garden for vegetables, herbs and cut flowers. Vagasky is a culinary instructor, talented chef and chocolatier, so it’s natural that the men have named their collaboration “Where Food Meets Flowers.”

“David and I have frequently entertained with his menus featuring the vegetables and flowers I grow, but we wanted to elevate our experiences to make something that’s memorable,” Martin says.

That melding came together recently for a dinner party honoring an artist friend for her 80th birthday, held both indoors and outdoors at Martin and Vagasky’s home. Martin’s two floral installations decorated the event, both in the kitchen and in the new outdoor dining room, with flowers suspended overhead and arrayed on the table.

“We’ve wanted to expand the property to allow us to host workshops and dinner parties that give us the ability to share the garden with our guests,” Martin explains. The USDA Zone 9a climate in Charleston is relatively mild, which means that there is always something to harvest, be it lettuce greens, parsley or *Ranunculus*. But given the unpredictable weather (James Island receives 60 inches of rain annually), they needed that space to be covered.

The November 2019 birthday celebration was the incentive for Martin and Vagasky to build a 36-by-14-foot covered extension outside their living room. “I love the idea that you can sit here and enjoy this space and also feel like you’re part of the garden,” Martin observes.

The party for 30 began indoors, where Vagasky served appetizers and one of Martin’s botanical sculptures took center stage. The designer knew he needed to create a skinny, tall, see-through piece to occupy a small footprint on the kitchen island.

“The construction itself spanned the length of the island, and I used skewers and orange mesh fencing material that I painted champagne color,” he explains. “I cut that material into strips and wove them in a way that would support the floral stems. It’s an interesting construction but also provides spaces to tie the flowers onto it for support.”



David Vagasky and Jim Martin





*Astilbe*, snapdragons, *Lisianthus* and *Hypericum* are threaded through the mesh or attached to the skewers, with the cut stems resting in shallow trays as the water source. *Farfugium Japonicum* 'Giganteum' (giant leopard plant) foliage hides the base. "Transparency was a must," Martin says. "I wanted to focus attention on separate flowers, allowing each to be viewed on its own."

Forty dream-catchers, suspended from cloth-covered piping above the dining table, continue the transparent linear motif. Martin wrapped the variously-sized rings with bullion wire, crisscrossing each with yarn, to create a dynamic armature through which are woven *Chrysanthemum* and clusters of windmill palm berries painted gold.

He continued the color scheme on the table below, filling 20 glass vessels with roses, *Hydrangea*, *Chrysanthemum* and more of the windmill palm berries. "I wanted to use glass for more transparency because of the lighting and colored candles," Martin explains. "The gold touches and all the other reflective materials add to the glimmer of the collection."

Even though there was a chill on the late fall evening, freestanding heaters and extra blankets ensured that everyone remained at the dining table during the soup, entrée and dessert courses, followed by numerous toasts.

As the season unfolds, Martin will continue to reinvent some of the landscape's ornamental areas to serve his floral design needs. "My idea is for this landscape to function in more ways than just being a pretty garden you can walk through. It's a beautiful space, but I want everything we grow here to be more purposeful. For example, I'm bringing thornless blackberries on the site that we'll use for cut stems. But we will also eat them." ■

## DETAILS

**Compost in My Shoe:** [compostinmyshoe.com](http://compostinmyshoe.com)  
@compostinmyshoe

**Upcoming:** Jim Martin will collaborate with **Hitomi Gilliam, AIFD**, for a **Charleston Parks Conservancy** "Art in the Parks" program and installation called "Swoon to the Rose," which opens March 26 for a three-week run. Other designers include **Rebecca Raymond, EMC**; **Scott Hasting, AIFD**; and **Jorge Uribe**. [charlestonparksconservancy.org](http://charlestonparksconservancy.org).



<https://qrs.ly/wib37oz>