


BY HAND



Gleanings
from the GARDEN

With countless varieties just waiting to be plucked, farmer-florist Erin Benzakein strolls through her flower beds in search of the perfect components to create coveted arrangements.

PHOTOGRAPHY GEORGIANNA LANE



As anyone with a passion for gardening knows, the heart-stirring need to turn the soil, tuck in seeds, and tenderly nurture each tiny sprout must be indulged. For Erin Benzakein, that yearning began with a 2-acre plot of land and a big dream that has blossomed into a thriving business, christened simply Floret.

Both a farm and a floral-design studio, Floret has drawn the attention of growers and consumers alike who support the local-flower renaissance taking place today around the globe. Erin's husband and two children work alongside her, making it a true family affair. With her quick success, this Washington State resident once contemplated expanding to a larger plot of land. "As we explored increasing our footprint, something just didn't sit right," she says. "Bigger isn't always better. So instead, we decided to hone our craft and focus our attention on perfecting the fine art of small-scale, high-intensity flower production."

Dahlias have always held sway in Erin's compact garden. Remarkably complex, they are actually composed of many individual flowers called florets—which makes them particularly appropriate posies for this eponymous venture. The entrepreneur started with just a few tubers a friend had given her, but the versatile blooms quickly



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Below: The graceful curves of honeysuckle vines lend both lithesome movement and unpretentious charm to this arrangement filled with decidedly feminine flora. Below: The delicately drawn and tinted illustrations on Floret's more than 100 packets of seeds are works of art in their own right.



*"Adopt the pace of nature:
her secret is patience."*

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

became one of her all-time favorites. She now cultivates over four thousand dahlia plants among the crowded rows of sweet peas, zinnias, and other selections that make up the business's sizable inventory.

Dahlias, which are native to Mexico, boast more than forty varieties, range in size from petite to "dinner plate," and can be found in every color but true blue. Erin believes the flowers are a wonderful addition to any late-summer bouquet, as they present countless design possibilities.

With hundreds of weddings and other special events in her portfolio, Erin generously shares her expertise at workshops, on her blog, and in books (she is working on a new guide to cut-flower gardening, due out in fall 2016). For her, inspiration begins and ends in the garden. "I pay close attention to how the plants are growing in their natural habitat and then mimic that in the vase," she says. "Arching stems, scrambling vines, movement, and wildness are all key ingredients in every bouquet."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS BENZAKEN



Design Elements

Using these components, create your own version of the stunning arrangement pictured opposite top:

1. Honeysuckle
2. Foxglove
3. Snowberry
4. Seven-son flower
5. Japanese anemone
6. 'Kathryn Morley' garden rose
7. 'Cafe au Lait' dahlia
8. 'Bracken Rose' dahlia
9. Aster



When creating a setting for a special occasion, in addition to displaying floral elements in a traditional centerpiece, consider using them in unexpected ways. "Flowers are the perfect finishing touch for any celebratory table," says Erin. "I love to tuck delicate blossoms in napkins, nestle them on top of cakes, and sprinkle them around anything that needs a little extra dose of beauty." Roses and dahlias are especially lovely choices because of their wide range of hues and varieties, as well as their ability to remain fresh.



