

Victory Gardens

Cultivating the slow-flower movement.

BOOKS For a product that's here today and gone tomorrow, flowers take a hefty environmental toll: the water used to bring the seeds to life, the energy required to pump the greenhouse full of heat, the fuel consumed by shipping. Only around 20 percent of the stems sold in the U.S. are grown domestically, with the remaining blooms imported from Colombia, Europe, and elsewhere. All this transpires before your bouquet is swaddled in nonrecyclable cellophane at the corner bodega.

According to landscape architects Henrietta Courtauld and Bridget Elworthy (aka the Land Gardeners), that's just the beginning of the industry's woeful practices. "If you are given a bunch of sweet peas," says Elworthy, "the first thing you would do is plunge your nose in to give them a jolly good smell. But if they aren't organic, chances are they've been sprayed with something really horrendous. Chemicals are regulated on food; they're not regulated on flowers." Pesticides are verboten at Wardington Manor, the Land Gardeners' sylvan HQ in Oxfordshire, England, where the happy by-product of their horticultural research stocks several London florists. In lieu of toxic fungicides and insecticides, the duo, who first met picking up their tots at nursery school, use homemade compost "teas" to cultivate microbially rich soil. "The more creatures you can encourage under the ground, the healthier everything is above," says Elworthy. Their best practices, broken down by season, are depicted—alongside urns that burst with kinky stems and feathery-edged dahlias—in their latest book,



BLOSSOM FORTH
FLORA AND FAUNA AT ERIN BENZAKEIN'S WASHINGTON STATE FARM (ABOVE). A RELAXED FORMALITY THRIVES AT THE LAND GARDENERS' OXFORDSHIRE ESTATE (BELOW).

Cut Flowers (Thames & Hudson). A peek into Courtauld and Elworthy's blossom-filled world, the book reads like a meander through their tumbling English gardens.

For a slightly more practical how-to, there's Erin Benzakein's recently published **A Year in Flowers** (Chronicle Books), which provides an illustrated guide to assembling compositions straight out of a 17th-century vanitas painting. Operating on a picturesque plot in Washington State, Benzakein (or @FloretFlower) has gathered quite a following as an exemplar of positive change in the industry. "I'm amazed and so happy about how fast the local-flower movement has taken hold. I've been hard at it for 10 years, and for the first five, nobody cared," she says, speaking from her farm on "bulb day." (A semitruck's worth of Dutch-tulip tubers will soon be dispatched.) For green thumb-less consumers curious about shopping more responsibly, Courtauld advises that it's all about minding Mother Nature: "Sometimes we have to explain that actually you can't get a certain flower in a certain season." Your locally grown, organic blooms may not last as long as their artificially fortified counterparts, but she counsels her patrons to enjoy the aging process. "When tulips start to reflex and curl, often people think, Oh, I'm just going to throw that away. But when the petals strip like fine silk and fall on the table, it's so pretty," says Courtauld. "We love a dying tulip." —LILAH RAMZI



TOP: FLORET FARMS. SHOT BY NGOC MINH NGO. BOTTOM: ALLAN POLLOK-MORRIS, VOGUE, 2017.