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Slow Flowers  
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Desert Collection, designed by Morgan Anderson, Ph.D., The FloriCulture  
Photo (c) Macey Sierra



# Green Horizons

2020 Slow Flowers' Floral Insights and Industry Forecast

“Today’s customers want their dollars to go to companies that will use their money to make the world a better place.” That sentence jumped out to me in an Oct. 7, 2019 *TIME* profile of **Rose Marcario**, CEO of **Patagonia**, which donates 1 percent of its sales to environmental groups (Patagonia’s sales recently surpassed \$1 billion annually). The story highlights a theme that resonates with that of our “**2020 Slow Flowers Floral Insights and Industry Forecast**”: “Belief-driven buyers choose a brand on the basis of its position on social issues.” If you think this is a fringe topic, according to market consultancy Edelman, nearly two in three consumers are belief-driven buyers.

We don’t have to all be environmental activists to use our brands to “do good,” but according to a Slow Flowers’ survey, most members and supporters view their company’s *values* and *mission* as precious brand assets as well as marketing tools. This sentiment was well expressed

by wedding and event florist **Tobey Nelson**, of **Tobey Nelson Weddings + Events** in Clinton, Wash., who spoke about sustainable floristry at last year’s **Slow Flowers Summit**, defining it in part as “making ‘better than’ choices to improve our environmental and social impact.”

For the sixth year, I’ve presented this annual forecast to document and track shifts taking place in the floral marketplace. I recently surveyed Slow Flowers members and social media followers with nine questions about their floral businesses, including emerging themes and topics important to them. I drew further insights from my first-person interviews for print and digital stories, interviews with more than one hundred Slow Flowers Podcast guests during 2019, and attitudes shared by thought-leaders in floral design, flower farming and related creative professions. You can read the full report online at [floristsreview.com](http://floristsreview.com) and read more extensive interviews with those quoted here at [slowflowersjournal.com/2020](http://slowflowersjournal.com/2020).

This page, from top:

(1) Two pieces inspired by the seasonal bounty of local flower farms, designed by Ashley Fox of Ashley Fox Designs.

Bouquet image: (c) Marit Williams Photography; tabletop image (c) Ashley Fox.

(2) Pastel flowers grown by farmer-florist Jessica Broyles of Starry Fields, (c) Emily Rose Photo; Dahlias grown and photographed by Adam and Jennifer O'Neal, farmer-florists of PepperHarrow Farm.

## 1. Agriculture-driven Design

Diversity of choice is a top concern for designers who want to expand their product knowledge and access to the best seasonally available botanicals. Whether they have growing or gardening experience or simply have a heightened desire to seek more unique choices in the marketplace, savvy florists are lining up more farm-direct options and rewarding wholesalers who are motivated to source from domestic growers on their behalf.

Minnesota-based **Ashley Fox**, of **Ashley Fox Designs** in St. Paul, Minn., notes that a shift takes place when floral artists become closer observers of nature, inspired by what might once have been considered nontraditional botanical elements. “My new emphasis is ‘never say never,’” Fox says, “in that there could be something really common or very mundane that sparks a more complex design when you place it next to another bloom.”

To that end, she finds herself open to floral varieties she had previously shied away from, especially choices grown by favorite local flower farms: callas, Asiatic and Oriental lilies, double-petaled *Gerbera*, for example. “The value I offer my clients is in how I use those flowers, on how I keep my eyes open to a shade within a petal or its form.”

The next chapter in this shift is being authored by designers who weave the agricultural narrative through their aesthetic and branding. From creative collaborations between flower farmers and floral designers to new apps and online resources that help florists learn *who* is growing *what* and *when* that’s available, the direct connections between the field and the studio are more important than ever.

## 2. Design-driven Flower Farming

The corollary to insight No. 1 is this: Enlightened flower farmers, *aka* “agripreneurs” are bringing a designer’s eye to floral crop selection and planning. “I know what colors I grow in spring, what I’m choosing for summertime and what I’m planting for fall,” says **Adam O’Neal**, of **PepperHarrow Farm** in Winterset, Iowa. “I choose seed and grow color for the entire season.”

The majority of those responding to the Slow Flowers 2020 Member Survey self-identify as “farmer florists” (44 percent) followed by “flower farmer” (43 percent) and “floral designer” (36 percent). Clearly, more florists are open to growing for themselves and more flower farmers are embracing design. The interdependency is increasingly evident for professionals in both worlds, with many floral ventures placing equal weight on both cutting garden (or more) and design studio.

“More flower farmers breaking into floral design and offering more retail options to customers. Designers are recognizing the quality, charm and uniqueness of local flowers, and customers are asking for more eco-friendly options,” observes **Teresa Tibbets**, of **Dandelion Farm** in Lander, Wyo.

The rise of design-driven flower farmers moves flowers from the commodity level to the couture level – and that elevates all of floristry.

**Jessica Broyles**, a farmer-florist who owns **Starry Fields Farm** in Rockfield, Ky., has set a goal to make local flowers accessible to florists. “I want to educate them on how to incorporate local flowers into their designs and promote local flowers as ‘something extra’ that will help set their work apart.”



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This page, from top:  
Seasonal peony sales at Red Twig Farms' retail shop; (c) Lindsey McCullough (top) and  
(c) Bob Stefto Photography (second/third) image; (Bottom) Johnny's Selected Seeds



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### 3. On-Farm Shopping

We've covered innovative farm-to-consumer retail concepts in prior Forecasts, including themes such as “More Farms Selling Direct” (2017) and “Farms Launch Direct-Ship Wholesale” and “Farms Shift into Retail” (2018).

Now upscaled, on-farm retail has taken the traditional honor-system flower cart and reimagined it as a full-service retail destination. **Dahlia May Flower Farm**, in Trenton, Ontario, Canada, and **Red Twig Farms**, in New Albany, Ohio, are examples of floral agriculture ventures with robust on-farm mercantile outlets offering freshly-picked flowers, gathered bouquets and potted plants for eager DIY customers.

It's all about sharing an authentic flower farm with nature-craved customers. “Most of the inquiries I get these days include ‘May we come and see the flowers?’” says farmer-florist **Kate Read**, of **Grey Tabby Flower Farm** in Lake Mary, Fla. “I think that people are craving some kind of connection with seeing flowers growing.” Consumer desire to experience and connect with the source of their flowers is certainly driving expansion of on-farm retail. Equally appealing are flower-farmer partnerships with nonfloral-focused retailers like apparel, coffee shops and bakeries.

### 4. Organic Flower Seeds

In the 2020 survey, 24 percent of respondents cited “sourcing organic flower seed” as an emerging theme for their business. While organic vegetable seeds are widely available, seed-sellers have not always been able to source a broader selection of organic flower options for their catalogs. That's changing in small ways, driven by demand from sustainable growers and conscious home gardeners. “While we already use most organic seed sources, we will continue to diversify our crops by adding more perennials that will self-sow year after year,” explains farmer-florist **Kate Meyer**, of **Chatham Flower Farm** in Painter, Va. **Denisa Anderson**, of **Merrily Along - Floral Design** in Everson, Wash., cites saving her own seeds from her organic cutting garden, as well as purchasing from sellers like **Johnny's Selected Seeds** and the **Floret** seed line.

I asked **Hillary Alger**, flower and herb product manager at **Johnny's** about the demand for organic flower seeds. “More organic flower seed’ is a common request we hear,” she says. “Slowly, we’re building a library of organic flower seed options, but, as you noted, it can be challenging – mostly due to the limited availability of variety and selection.” According to Alger, for 2020, seven of the 23 new flower seeds and varieties offered by **Johnny's** are organic – that's 30 percent. There is great potential in this category, and I expect that demand for organic flower seeds will stimulate more options in the marketplace in the future.

### 5. Chemical-free Sentiments

“Eco and nontoxic” floral design was the first theme in the very first “Slow Flowers Floral Insights and Industry Forecast,” published in 2015. I noted that many Slow Flowers designers and farmer-florists were actively rejecting floral foam while seeking new methods, techniques and mechanics for arranging flower stems. Three years later, in the 2018 Forecast, we revisited the topic, highlighting new “chemical-free” mechanics for floral design.

The conversation continues for 2020, with more voices and

This page, top two images: Floral artist Susan Mcleary is a design influencer who advocates for foam-free practices in her large-scale botanical installations. (c) Amanda Dumouchelle  
Image 3: The Flori.Culture, (c) Macey Sierka  
Image 4: Harmony Harvest Farm

opinions. Floral foam, yes or no? In this year's survey, 66 percent of respondents indicated their floral practices are based on foam-free options; 25 percent said they use foam as their design mechanic only some of the time.

"We're using less and less foam each year and loving the creativity it requires – as well as the environmental benefits," says **Erin Shackelford**, of **Camas Designs** in Friday Harbor, Wash.

Concern about the use of plastic and chemically treated products in other aspects of floristry is also being cited. "I am quite intentional in my designs of late, to use wire or jute/hemp twine in lieu of plastic zip ties," says Tobey Nelson. "In 2020, I will be working toward using up all of my synthetic ribbons, with the intention of moving toward only natural fibers."

**Becky Feasby**, of **Prairie Girl Flowers** in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, says, "I would love to learn more about how painting and bleaching natural materials affects their ability to be composted," a comment that highlights a future topic to explore.

Sustainability, chemical-free practices, waste-reduction and conscious sourcing will continue to move toward the mainstream floral marketplace. A growing niche of floral professionals want to "do the right thing" and communicate their mission to customers and clients who will reward those values with their patronage.

## 6. Collections as a Marketing Tool

From flower farms narrowing their focus to "what sells best," to florists branding a distinct aesthetic, there are two schools of thought at play this coming year: 1) Do you diversify by growing more floral varieties (46 percent) or narrow the focus by growing only a few key floral types (39 percent), and 2) Do you brand or market a specific crop, floral variety or design style? Respondents placed nearly equal balance on *doing one thing well* and *offering more choice* as they seek that sweet spot of profitability.

**Morgan Anderson, Ph.D.**, of **The Flori.Culture** in Scottsdale, Ariz., has adopted floral collections as a strategic marketing tool for serving her customer base – largely out-of-town corporate event planners whose business brings them to desert destinations near her. She likens the seasonal botanical collections to couture collections of fashion houses. "Forming a seasonal collection, based on a muse of my choosing, is an unbound artistic outlet that has led to becoming one of The Flori.Culture's strengths," Anderson says. "Now, they are also a strategic marketing opportunity that evokes my signature style for clients to enjoy. And it is working."

**Harmony Harvest Farm**, in Weyers Cave, Va., uses floral collections as a farm-to-florist direct marketing tool, says **Stephanie Auville**. "Our color-based boxes include full collections of 100 stems or half collections of 50 stems, allowing florists to purchase in their color palette and receive a heavenly mix of fresh diverse ingredients that are as functional as they are stunning." Boxes include focal flowers, filler flowers and other distinctive flower types, with the intention that a single collection contains "all the ingredients to make stunning well-rounded arrangements," she says. With palettes such as soft, essential, vibrant, blanc (white), or by season, Harmony Harvest Farm's collections are intended to augment the "staple" botanicals their floral customer already sources from a local wholesale outlet.



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Top two images: Sinclair & Moore floral design for a Sun Valley wedding, (c) Ryan Flynn Photography  
 Third image: Polychromatic bouquet by Whitney Muncy, Emerald Design  
 Fourth image: "Rainbow wedding," by Sinclair & Moore, (c) Belathée Photography

### 7. One to Many: A Monobotanical Aesthetic

The term “monobotanical” has crept into my consciousness in recent months, cited by a few designers as a fresh version of the tone-on-tone aesthetic. Single-variety bouquets were once synonymous with the “roundy-moundy” style of the '90s. The new fresher take features single-variety stems arranged in a voluminous or loose aesthetic, elevating focal flowers or delicate accent flowers alike.

Monobotanical styling places the focus on texture and shape, and can be whimsical, sophisticated or dramatic, “allowing the flowers to stand alone and be noticed,” observes farmer-florist **Lynn Windmeyer**, of **Homeplace Fields Flower Farm** in St. Joseph, Mo. **Lori Himes**, AIFD, of **A Bloom, Ltd.**, in Walkersville, Md., notes: “We are having requests for lots of foliage with only one type of flower incorporated into the designs.”

Then there’s the touch of contrast mentioned by **Blair Lynn**, of **Sweet Blossoms** in Frederick, Md.: “I am liking monochromatic and monobotanical for its simplicity, but I gravitate toward a look that also has a pop of contrasting color in it.”

If you have a singular sensation to showcase, work monobotanical bouquets and arrangements into your portfolio, and see what new excitement you create with clients.

### 8. Polychromatic Palettes

By the time you read this report, Pantone Color Institute will have announced its “2020 Color of the Year,” influencing everything from floral palettes to home furnishings to kitchen appliances. For the Slow Flowers community, I’m hearing predictions for a polychromatic rainbow of hues in the coming season.

“I see nature’s colors across the spectrum,” says one respondent. “I have had several wedding inquiries, and they have all been multicolored hand-tied bouquets,” says **Stacy Schmidt**, of **Narrow Trail Farm** in Baldwin City, Kan. “Fingers crossed – brights are coming back.”

Adds **Kelly Shore**, of **Petals by the Shore** in Damascus, Md.: “Color blocking in design will become more visible.”

The survey reflects a slight nod to the golden hues of yellow, with 23 percent of respondents predicting tints, tones and shades across the yellow continuum – butter yellow, lemon, ochre, mustard, antique gold, coffee, tan, taupe, citron, chartreuse and honey. Other than yellow, there is no major standout, thanks to every color of the rainbow receiving between 10 percent and 15 percent of the forecast vote.

What does that tell me? I’ve decided that rainbow palettes, more aptly named “polychromatic,” will wow the marketplace in 2020. It’s not for everyone, of course. But even the maestro of neutrals, **Steven Moore**, of Seattle-based **Sinclair & Moore**, designed an unforgettably prismatic wedding, published by *Martha Stewart Weddings* in 2015. Inspired by a colorful world of botanicals, I love what I’m seeing from floral designers, farmer-florists and growers whose penchant for petals with pigment is on the rise. Let’s love all hues!

### 9. Shifting Forms: Geometric, Deconstructed/Reconstructed

While 43 percent of our survey respondents predicting that 2020 will see a sustained “loose, soft and fluid” floral aesthetic,



This page, top: Floral design by Rachel Johnson of Simply Grounded  
Bottom: Floral design by Teresa Tibbets, Dandelion Farm

there is also indication that asymmetrical geometric forms and “deconstructed/reconstructed” silhouettes are emerging (20 percent).

Exaggerated linear shapes may be influenced by ikebana, or they may be a continuance of transparent/open-form shapes, as we highlighted in the 2019 forecast. “The more airy, deconstructed design work is not what I mainly do, but it is what I see emerging more and more – and would like to explore further,” says **Daniele Strawn** of **JoLee Blooms & Design** in Bloomfield, Calif.

“Creating from locally farm-grown flowers entirely lends itself to the loose or natural aesthetic, enhancing or highlighting the natural curves of each stem is a motivator in my design process,” observes **Lynn Windmeyer**. **Amy Balsters**, of **Amy Nicole Floral** in Alexandria, Va., cited floral-focused and open-form designs, for example.

“I am a Sogetsu Ikebana designer and this formative training has set my aesthetic towards exploring each flower, leaf & branch material for its unique sculptural potential,” says **Rachel Johnson** of San Francisco-based **Simply Grounded**. “The design concept of ‘dismantle and rearrange’ is one we explore over and over again to expose the unexpected beauty within.”

## 10. Responding to Climate Change

Forty-four percent of our survey respondents say they are adjusting growing practices to adapt to climate change. The variables of changing weather and natural disasters have disrupted growers across North America, with extremes ranging from drought and fires to hurricanes and flooding.

“We’re working with the seasons and dry conditions by utilizing as many native varieties and plants adaptive to our region,” notes **Stacy Schmidt** of Kansas. “There is still a lot of work to do to promote nonstandard varieties to consumers. All our future improvements are about water control due to climate change impacts.” Use of natural resources, alternative energy sourcing and the adoption of restorative agriculture practices are factoring into the decisions of many.

Flower growers are not the only ones challenged by unpredictable weather or climate patterns. Indeed, everyone is adapting, as florists who crave date-specific botanical types know now, more than ever, there’s potential for a freak summer hailstorm or unseasonably early frost wiping out perfect planning for a client’s wedding.

So, what are people doing about this reality?

“I’m looking to extend the seasons, with different varieties that can take our heat and humidity,” says Florida-based **Kate Read**.

Adds **Teresa Tibbets**, “I’m working with the seasons and dry conditions by utilizing as many native varieties and plants best-adapted to the Rocky Mountain’s extreme climate and short growing season. There is still a lot of work to do to promote nonstandard varieties to consumers, though.”

In Seattle recently, event florist **Lisa Dunton** of **Lisa Dunton Studio** convened “The Floral Biz & Climate Change,” a roundtable discussion for her peers. Rather than feeling helpless about her worries, Dunton says she decided to create a “chance to air our thoughts about our role in the climate

emergency and strategize about our next steps.”

Because of her heightened awareness, Dunton has also taken steps in her business. “I made a decision at the beginning of 2019 to source only West Coast flowers, with a little bit from Hawaii. I’ve let my clients know, and I also made a point to talk about it with them. I’ve told them, ‘Hey, things might start to look different, but here’s why.’ And all my clients have been really receptive.”

With decades in the floral marketplace, Dunton says she can measure her personal shift from long-distance sourcing to finding design ingredients closer to home – and that also includes foraging. “I’ve also foraged at least 15 percent to 20 percent of what I put in my arrangements now, so that’s hyper-local,” she says.

I have tracked the rise of foraging for years and noted the comeback of “modern everlastings” and dried flowers in the Slow Flowers 2016 Forecast. As more designers embrace a new aesthetic, perhaps one silver lining to changing climates is our willingness to work more closely with the seasons rather than try to outsmart Mother Nature. ■



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