

Organic and Home Grown Blooms

Photographs by Clive Nicholls

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The 'field to vase' slow flower movement practiced here is such a brilliant idea...

There is a quiet revolution underway in the British countryside – in tiny fields, bustling hedgerows, ancient walled gardens and allotments, hundreds and thousands of flowers and bundles of fresh foliage are being grown for cutting as we rediscover the beauty of home grown flowers.

Georgie Newbery (Photo 1) of Common Farm Flowers in Charlton Musgrove has turned her passion for flowers into our pleasure growing more than 250 different flower varieties to whisk into jam jars, bouquets and grand arrangements. Her blooms regularly wing their way countrywide for us to decorate with and to delight in.

Georgie and husband Fabrizio Boccha, struggling to make ends meet with chickens and pigs on their Somerset smallholding, decided to diversify into flowers, initially sweet peas (Photo 2). Success with roadside sales of these fragrant flowers led them to turn over more and more land to flower cultivation. Five years ago they formally established their artisan floristry business and now grow around seven acres of cut-flower blooms, together with huge expanses of hedgerows, shrubs and trees (Photo 4). They devised a planting plan which would realise a succession of organic, home grown, British flowers throughout the year to support ever increasing demand for more relaxed gentle and fragranced stems.

Fabrizio masterminds and cultivates the plantings, sowing annuals successionally, to prolong the flowering season. Poly tunnels further extend first and last flower picks and the huge seasonal variety ensures there is pretty much something in bloom all year round.

There is a comprehensive mix of annuals, perennials, bulbs and shrubs. Spring beds are surprisingly abundant, with narcissi, tulips and foxgloves (Photo 3). Summer yields a plethora of traditional delights in relaxed and soft gait, especially roses which assume the air of roses past; relaxed, perfumed and beguiling. Stems are gathered for bouquets and corsages but sometimes a basketful of petal confetti is requested (Photo 5); the natural finishing touch for summer weddings. Other traditional flowers gather in beds, planted harmoniously like living bouquets; *Achillea millefolium* (yarrow), peonies, roses, *Gypsophila*, *Verbena*, *Dianthus barbatus* (sweet William) mingle in beds as they would in the vase (Photo 6). Later, brilliant dahlias bloom and glow right through to autumn.

The farm's hedgerows bustle with an array of verdant foliage from newly planted, lime green hornbeam to glossy evergreen ivies, blossomed, serrated-leaved and berried hawthorn, spiky and variegated holly; something for every occasion and every season.

Cultivated blooms for cutting assume a wayward air, mixing easily with wild flowers which Georgie sweeps up into her arrangements. Favourites include guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*) from the hedgerow and wild meadow flowers; cowslips, buttercups, ox-eye daisies, field poppies, red campion and wild carrot (Photo 7). Fabrizio carefully impregnates the fields with tiny wildflower plug plants, encouraging colonies to increase and multiply.

The poly tunnels offer more contained cultivation, though sweet peas scamper their poles and strings right up to the roof. Other