



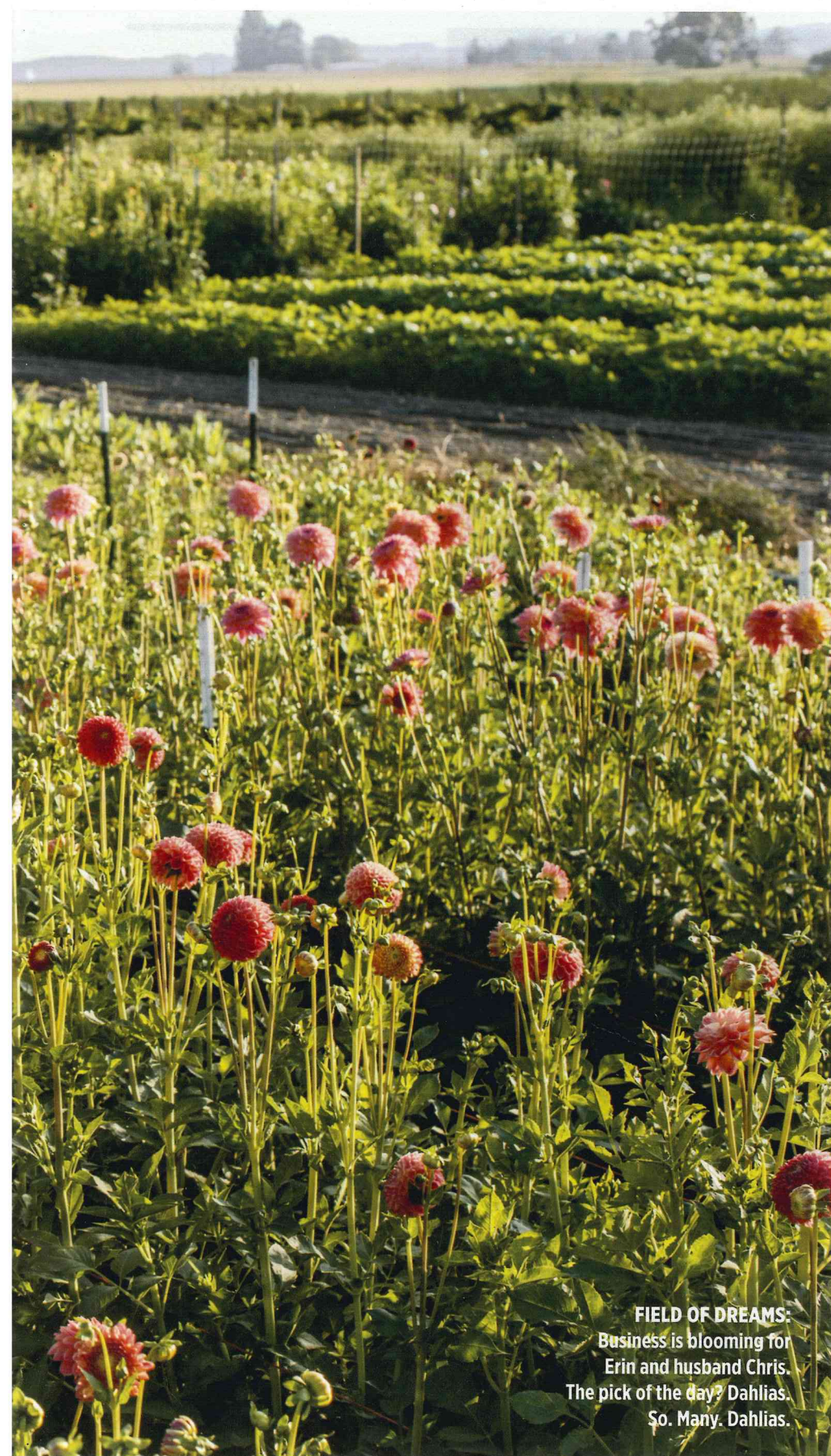
BLOOM SERVICE

Call her the Dahlia Lama.
Erin Benzakein of
Floret Flower Farm is
inspiring a new generation
of florist-farmers with
hands-on workshops at her
3-acre farm in Washington's
lush Skagit Valley.
(Warning: You'll want to
quit your day job.)



**BUSHEL
AND A PECK:**
Erin poses with her
blooms (and brood)
before talking shop at
Floret Flower Farm.





FIELD OF DREAMS:
Business is blooming for
Erin and husband Chris.
The pick of the day? Dahlias.
So. Many. Dahlias.

After leaving Seattle in search of a “slower, more intentional” lifestyle, Erin Benzakein found more than just a home in Washington’s Skagit Valley; she found a calling. Shortly after her great-grandmother passed away, Erin planted a double row of sweet peas in her vegetable garden as a tribute to her flower-loving relative. They grew in such abundance that Erin started sharing bundles with anyone who would take them. From that first humble crop nearly eight years ago, a flower business was born.

Now that Floret Flower Farm is in full bloom (in addition to a packed calendar of weddings and events, Floret flowers are carried at local Whole Foods stores), Erin has turned her attention to sharing her home-grown wisdom with budding flower enthusiasts. Several times a year, the Floret team opens its fields to workshop attendees looking to draw inspiration from Erin’s signature organic design style and to get a glimpse at the labor involved with running a small flower farm. The workshops, now in their third year, draw participants from across the United States and all over the globe (Brazil, Thailand, England). “I love empowering people with the knowledge that you don’t need hundreds of acres or fancy equipment to be a flower farmer,” Erin says. “You can achieve this job with drive and creativity. That’s the message I want to spread.” If Floret’s success is any indication, that message will spread like wildflowers.



KNOW-HOW

ARRANGING FLOWERS LIKE A PRO

START WITH A FLUTED VASE.

"That way, the arrangement will follow the lines of the vessel and feel more loose and natural," says Erin. "A good rule of thumb is for the bouquet to be about three times as tall and two times as wide as the vase."

ADD STEMS WITH A NATURAL CURVE.

For the wild, organic look that Erin loves, she suggests opting for rambling rose branches, raspberry greens, or thornless blackberry vines as opposed to stiff and straight stems like boxwood or privet.

LAYER IN SUPPORTING GREENS.

Use scented geraniums or hop vines to echo the shape you've already established.

INCORPORATE FOCAL FLOWERS.

Place smaller, more delicate blooms along the the bouquet's perimeter and larger, showier flowers closer to the center.


Erin's go-to showstoppers include dahlias, cosmos, and zinnias.

ADD SOMETHING "TWINKLY."

Finish with a few dainty touches of tiny pods, delicate grasses, or miniature flowers.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: 1. After a harvesting demonstration, participants are turned loose in the fields to cut blooms, which they will later load into the farm truck and turn into arrangements. **2.** With the entire barn brimming with flowers, the design process begins. Here, Carra Duggan of Everett Family Farm in Santa Cruz, California, gathers her freshly picked supplies. **3.** Erin is constantly testing new varieties of flowers—50 to 100 of a single bloom at a time—to find unique types. Out of her 75 dahlias, Cafe au Lait (shown) is easily her favorite. "They have a gorgeous, creamy blush hue, and they can grow as large as your head," she says. **4.** Florists-in-training Jordyn Pecha (far left), Katie Elliott (center), and her mother Teresa Engbretson (right), all from Washington, admire their hard work. **5.** The makings for the perfect arrangement. (See "Arranging Flowers Like a Pro" for how the pieces come together.)



Flowering branches, like this hot pink prunus (cherry blossom), add height and provide just enough structure.

Delicate grasses create texture and provide what Erin describes as a “twinkly” element.

Some of Erin’s favorite “showier” dahlias include Cafe au Lait, September Morning, and Gitty Up.

Erin loves to use scented geranium leaves as a supporting green.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: 1. Bruna Ferreira, from Brazil's Flora de Série, models a crowning achievement from the workshop. **2.** Attendees strike a playful pose outside of the Floret Flower Farm barn. **3.** Ashley Rodriguez of the beloved food blog *Not Without Salt* (*notwithoutsalt.com*) caters an extravagant farewell dinner. **4.** Just a small sampling of the feast.

OPPOSITE: Because many of Erin's workshop attendees are interested in wedding floral design, the final day of the workshop is focused on centerpieces. After attendees set the long farmhouse table, they gather around it for the locally sourced celebration. With the sun setting and the barn draped in flowers and aglow with candles, the group celebrates late into the night.

Visit floretoflowers.com for the 2016 schedule of workshops, and look for the Floret team as they travel around the country next year teaching one-day classes aimed at connecting farmers and florists.



