

CUT FLOWERS

An enormous armful of pastel peach ranunculus, homegrown at Floret Farm for cutting.





Glorious Colour

Lovers of cut flowers will know of Erin Benzakein, the energy behind Floret Flowers, in Washington, USA. Here she touches on the brilliant promise of a new season

Of all the seasons, spring is by far my favorite because it is filled with so much hope and anticipation for the future. After a long dreary winter, it's always a thrill to watch life return to the garden and to once again begin filling my house with flowers.

In early spring, even the smallest bloom is cause for celebration. I walk the fields daily, keeping my gaze low to the ground, looking closely for signs of new growth pushing up through the soil. Narcissus are always the first to arrive, and their sweetly scented blooms are a welcome treat. As the daffodils fade, tulips take center stage and offer the first rainbow of color for the year.

All around our property, the apple, cherry, hawthorn, and plum trees start exploding into clouds of tiny pastel blooms. The bees arrive right on cue and make quick work of pollinating the trees, and on sunny days the air is filled with a light fragrance along with the sound of thousands of tiny workers buzzing away. Soon after, the blossoms



give way to young fruit, and the once-bare branches are cloaked in a new set of leaves. In the hedgerows lining our field, wild roses start to flower just as the peonies and earliest perennials arrive.

As the weather warms, my neighbours emerge from their winter hibernation and can be spotted pattering around their gardens. Weekends are filled with the loud hum of lawn mowers and lots of fence-side chatting about the weather and plants. In the fields surrounding our rural neighbourhood, tractors prepare the soil for planting, and farm crews return to work for the season.

Each morning the sun rises a little earlier, and the birdsongs get so loud that I can't sleep past 5am if we've left the windows open. I'm always amazed by how much changes over the course of this season: in just three short months, our previously barren landscape transforms into a dense and richly layered sea of green. And while in early spring I have to hunt for even the tiniest treasures, by the end there's more abundance and beauty pouring out of the garden than I can possibly keep up with.



Above left *Lonicera periclymenum* 'Munster'.
Above right *Ranunculus*.
This image Erin prepares cut flowers at her home.





What you need

Structural foliage

Snowberry 'Hancock'

Supporting ingredient

Blueberry 'Duke' foliage

Textural ingredient

Lonicera 'Munster'

Supporting flower

Helleborus orientalis

Focal flower

Ranunculus 'Pastel Mix'

Airy accents

Heuchera 'Amber Waves', *Filipendula ulmaria*

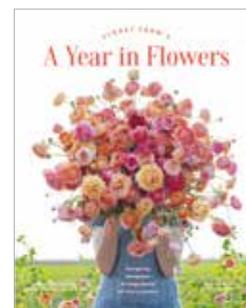
MAKE A SPRING CENTERPIECE

Behind our funky old house sits a one-car garage that I've transformed into a bright, cheerful flower studio. It has uneven floors; thin, rattling windows; and so many cracks in the walls that plants often make their way inside to bloom. When I first took over this space, I was embarrassed by how rundown it looked on the outside, so I planted a dozen heirloom climbing roses and vines all around the perimeter in hopes that it would eventually be swallowed up in a sea of blooms. The plants flourished, and now I'm continually cutting away branches from the windows so I can still see outside.

Right outside the studio's back door is the most glorious honeysuckle vine. At the tail end of every spring, it explodes into a cloud of fragrant flowers,

filling the studio and our backyard with the sweetest scent. I'm always shocked by how vigorous this vine remains, even though we cut from it for nearly every late-spring bouquet.

Inspired by this treasured honeysuckle, I wanted flowers to complement its two-toned blossoms, so I combined it with the last of the blush pink and buttercream yellow ranunculus from our greenhouse. *Filipendula* buds, the veining of the hellebores, and new growth of blueberry and snowberry foliage help carry pink throughout the arrangement. To bring in a tad more yellow and a bit of sparkle, I threaded in airy heuchera flowers, and I used a vintage footed bowl from our local antique store to ground this ethereal, feminine arrangement. ■



Extracted from **Floret Farm's A Year in Flowers** by Erin Benzakein. Photographs by Chris Benzakein. (Chronicle Books, £21.99)