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Posted in *All Floristry and Crafts, Shrubs and Climbers, May, June, July, August* on 1st August 2018

Did you know that the retail value of the cut flower industry in Britain is worth over two billion pounds? That's the same as the UK music industry, yet only 10% of those flowers are British grown, compared to nearly half twenty years ago. So that means if we're not growing them in our own gardens, we're importing 90% of the flowers we have sitting on our tables, and yet this country is one of the most perfect growing environments in the world.

Where food is concerned we're way ahead, with many of us now really seeking out locally grown vegetables, herbs and fruit in preference to those produced abroad. Air miles apart, we've cottoned on to the fact that buying local and seasonal means our food is likely to be fresher and better quality, with an ever-changing variety of things to eat through the seasons. Why do we not apply these same rules when we buy cut flowers? Most of us don't even think about where the flowers have come from, yet of course there's a similar benefit of buying more locally as there is with food – a longer natural vase life and more beautiful, sympathetic seasonal flowers. Like eating strawberries at Christmas, do we really want imported roses on our tables 365 days of the year?

As we have remained apparently indifferent to where our flowers have come from, first rate British growers are giving up, unable to compete with the larger more efficient mono-cultural growing units in Holland and elsewhere. A dwindling band of British cut flower growers are still keeping going, but it's time we reversed that trend.

I made a one hour film on this subject with Gardener's World. We explored the idea of home-grown cut flowers, how to fill our houses with beautiful, locally grown flowers and visited many small scale specialist growers. We filmed at a tropical orchid flower farm near Chichester, and with the sweet pea grower, David Guscott, just down the road. We went to the Scilly Isles to visit the scented narcissus growers who supply the wonderful fragrant bunches through the leaner flower months of November to March. We went to Cornwall, to Lincolnshire and the fertile fens, and to the rose growers, Country Roses, on the Essex/Suffolk border.

Country Roses are typical of the businesses from which I would like to buy my flowers. Danae and Robin Duthy have been growing cut flower roses since 2001 and are knowledgeable specialists in their field. They now have sixty different varieties and add new discoveries every year. They know, in every colour, which will give you the best vase life, or the best scent, which will dry the best for natural pot pourri or confetti at a wedding. They know which make the best buttonholes and which will last best on a wedding hat, and they'll give you all this advice when you're trying to work out which to buy. Their roses are grown outside in fields, with crops produced from May to October, with conditions much the same as any garden rose. If it rains, the fully open flowers are damaged, but with most, so long as they are rigorously headed, there are more buds and flowers to form.

The varieties are selected primarily for their beauty and fragrance which develops fully in the field environment – not hurried along under glass nor, like the Dutch and Kenyan varieties, bred to be without scent to extend their vase life. Many cut flower roses have almost lost their scent; as with sweet peas, the strongly perfumed varieties have shorter vase lives, and so most commercial growers avoid these like the plague. Country Roses have a different set of priorities, with some heavy and long producers on the farm, but they also grow the wonderful but short flowering forms like the Gallica rose 'Charles de Mills' and the once-



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only flowering 'Constance Spry'. For them, it's the scent and beauty that matters, not the volumes that each bush produce.

What all this adds up to is a perfect bowl of roses which will fill a room with scent. Can these really be related to those over-pert, almost scentless, dull-as-ditchwater imported stems? Go local, go seasonal, and you'll treasure the flowers you buy.

[Read Country Roses' Top recommendations for cut flower roses](#)

This article was first published in 2014.

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