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## how to grow your own wedding: part 1

Posted in *All Floristry and Crafts, All Gardening Advice, Annuals, March, April, Cosmos* on 1st May 2018

Bea, our head gardener, was getting married in July and she was having her wedding party in the garden at Perch Hill. It gave us both an idea – to grow her wedding – as much of the food and flowers as possible.

Could we grow all the flowers and almost all the food, barring, of course, the meat? There were going to be between 80 and 100 people of all ages, so it was a challenge, but we thought we could do it and it would save her and Mark a fortune.

In this 2-part series, I will show you exactly what to do at every stage – which are the best and easiest plants to grow, how to sow the seeds and take care of them, how to arrange the flowers in the hall, tent or church, and how to cook for a huge band of people, with plenty of things easy to prepare well before.

### To start

First, the planning. The party starts in the late afternoon. To drink, when the guests first arrive, there will be peach or raspberry Bellinis, made with some fruit picked from the garden. Our 'Glen Ample' raspberries should be at their peak and we can build up a supply by freezing them in the weeks beforehand to make a sieved purée for the Bellini base. We can also use all our blackcurrants to make cassis and with this offer Kirs as an alternative.

For canapés with the early drinks, we will make lots of different bruschettas. If we get going with sowing tomatoes very soon, we should have our first 'Sungold', 'Gardener's Delight' and 'Black Krim' from the greenhouse and can mix these with garlic and plenty of home-grown basil. If only we had harvestable olives from our tree, we could use their oil, but that's yet to come.

The last of the early broad beans will need eating by then and they'll be the big, slightly leathery ones at that stage in the year, perfect for making minty bean humus, so we can have that on bruschettas too. We'll have plates of just-picked baby vegetables – radish, mini carrots, peas, purple-podded mange touts, and the late, mini broad bean 'Stereo' – on plates covered in ice. There will be crisp courgette wedges with anchovy mayonnaise and stuffed courgette flowers with goat's cheese and honey. All that should keep the wolf from the door before the main dinner.

### Flower power

If it's a nice day and evening, the party can all take place outside, but there'll be a tent in case of rain. We'll need to decorate it and bring the garden inside. The tent might be Moroccan in style or a plain, old-fashioned scout tent in cream and Bea would like huge hanging globes of flowers, possibly just Cosmos 'Purity' and dill flowers, which will look like fluffy clouds and smell fantastic, or maybe a more colourful medley of annuals.

Either is easy to grow and globes are the best thing to use to decorate a tent – even when the whole place is heaving with people, the flowers are not obscured, but hang in a prize position, above everyone's heads. The globe bases will be 8in oasis spheres wrapped in chicken wire, then studded with foliage and flowers.

We plan to have table centres of potted acidanthera, the scented, delicate cousin of the gladioli, but will sow



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plenty of hardy annuals as a backup in case we have a cold, late year and these are not flowering. When she gets married, Bea will, we hope, carry a bouquet of roses, alchemilla and sweet peas, which should be sown now.

## Main courses

The grilled meat will be carved on a trestle table and there'll be Greek courgette filo pie for the vegetarians. Both will be served with salads and new [potatoes](#), dug that morning so they're as sweet as possible and cooked with fistfuls of [mint](#). It will be too difficult to keep these hot for large numbers so we'll dress them in a saffron sauce and serve a mint and parsley bulgar wheat salad as a light, fragrant alternative.

There will also be orange, pink and white stripy and purple [beetroot](#) in a Lebanese tahini salad, home-made mint jelly and platters of salad scattered with [blue borage](#) and orange marigold flowers. A vat of Turkish summer purslane tzatziki – with plenty of garlic – will be the sauce for the beef, pork and lamb.

## Sweet endings

I hope to make an almond meringue house – like a ginger bread house – for the wedding-cake-cum-party pudding. Meringue may be too fragile to construct anything upstanding, but I love the idea of it clad with fruit stuck on with royal icing – red, white and blackcurrants dripping from the walls like wisteria and clematis, all served with raspberries, strawberry and gooseberry ice creams.

Start sowing sweet peas early to make sure they're blooming in time for a summer wedding:

1. Sow [sweet pea seeds](#) into [rootainers](#) (long, thin pots with channels down the sides). These promote quick root formation; sowing as late as this, you are playing slight catch-up.
2. Protect against mice. They love sweet pea seed and seedlings.
3. Germinate seeds with a little bottom heat if you can – this speeds up the process. Even though spring is here, always sow inside on a window ledge or in a greenhouse.
4. Leave them to get their roots established for another four weeks. Keep moist, but not dripping wet, before pinching the tips out.
5. Plant out with plenty of manure in their planting position. Surround plants with slug prevention. I use a strip of washed inland sharp sand at least a foot wide and two inches deep.
6. As the young plants begin to grow, tie them into a frame of bamboo or hazel.
7. Pinch out the tendrils.
8. Feed with [potash-rich fertiliser](#) once they start to flower.

If you're late to sow the seeds, plant out prepared [sweet pea seedlings](#) in March/April.

[Click here to read Part 2 of Grow your own wedding.](#)

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