

episode 30 show notes and advice

From selling her own beautiful produce at markets in London, to exciting collaborations with Skye Gyngell at Spring Restaurant and Melissa Richardson of JamJar Flowers (a previous guest on the podcast), Jane Scotter has had a wonderful journey to running her 16-acre, biodynamic farm, Fern Verron.

Joining Sarah & Arthur from her idyllic spot in the foothills of the Black Mountains, just on the edge of Herefordshire's Golden Valley, Jane discusses the enjoyable experience of growing for Skye, how biodynamics helps her cultivate truly seasonal produce, and the love and care she shows to those learning under her tutorship.

In this episode, discover:

- The success Jane has seen with biodynamics
- The marvellous farm at Fern Verron
- Jane's favourite varieties of tomato, courgette & aubergine for flavour & appearance
- Their collaboration with Melissa Richardson from JamJar Flowers and Skye Gyngell at Spring Restaurant

Links & references:

Shop on the Sarah Raven website: <http://bit.ly/3jvbaeu>

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Episode 30 advice sheet | With Jane Scotter from Fern Verron Biodynamic Farm

With Jane Scotter from Fern Verron Biodynamic Farm in the Black Mountains - on the Herefordshire/Welsh border.

Fern Verron Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/fernverron/>

Jane's background: Jane co-founded Neal's Yard dairy in the 80s with Randolph Hodgson. To source for the dairy, Jane travelled around the UK tasting and collecting cheese from small cheesemakers, using traditional methods.

Jane first came to the Black Mountain area on holiday and was looking to move from London after 20 years. She plunged in and bought the land at Fern Verrow where she is still living and has been farming since 1996 - totally self-taught.

Fern Verrow is a 16-acre plot including some woodland and wild areas. At the heart of it, there is soft fruit and veg, and some extra areas for field crops, making up 12 acres overall under cultivation.

There is a lot packed into a small area. The beauty of the place is extremely important and comes first for Jane, followed by making it both productive and commercial.

The current set up at Fern Verrow

There is an 80m by 30m polytunnel, plus a 40ft x 70ft glasshouse for growing, and a separate glasshouse for propagation.

The rest is all outside it is very wet in this part of Herefordshire, with frosts from November to early May (as in most places in England) and snow for a week every couple of years. But Jane still believes it's much better to grow her crops outside than in, wherever possible.

Everything is grown used biodynamic methods, a school of gardening that takes organic growing one step further. Biodynamics takes natural forces such as planets and moon cycles into consideration. As Jane says, "Nowadays, most people have lost that connection" and she finds it helpful having this set of rules of what to do on which day, particularly when things are difficult.

Jane doesn't know how it works, just that it does. Her crops are fantastic, and there is increasing evidence that things grown biodynamically taste better and may even be better for you. It also helps Jane to structure her days, months and year. When there's so much to do, how do you decide what to prioritise? That's just what it helps with. In fact, we are synchronising with our natural environment, so all of nature benefits.

Who Fern Verrow supply

They deliver to Spring Restaurant in central London (as well as Spring-To-Go in Notting Hill and Melissa Richardson at JamJar Flowers). They deliver on a Tuesday and Friday, and what Jane has grown, will be on plates in London the same night. For that they harvest on Monday and Thursday and do the farming on the other days.

Skye used to be head chef at Petersham Nurseries. She took a break to travel and was inspired by Alice Waters (Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California), particularly impressed with Alice and the restaurant's relationship with the grower Bob Canard. From that moment, Skye was looking for a similar set up in the UK. In September 2015 Jane and Skye's collaboration began and it has been a huge success ever since. Skye writes her menus according to what's ready, rather than the other way round. That's HUGELY unusual and a grower's dream.

Jane also grows flowers for Spring and JamJar (see episode 17 of the podcast), who arrange all the flowers in the restaurant.

Favourite varieties for this time of year

Jane likes new varieties suitable for gourmet restaurants. She gets seeds mainly from the USA, e.g. 7rowseeds, Johnny Seeds, West Coast Seeds, High Mowing Seeds and Uprising Seeds.

Tomatoes

Jane always grows varieties that taste incredible, even in the shorter season of UK, and they need to look good too. She always grows tomatoes inside.

Beefsteak

- 'Berner Rose' – great big fat beef tomato, pinky colour, so flavoursome, super-sweet perfect slightly underripe, and for cooking they're a dream. Just a pinch salt and that's it.
- 'Olirose' – another favourite with a pinkier skin.

Cherry tomatoes

- 'Jaune Flamme' – favourite yellow tomato. Makes incredible tomato jam.

Courgettes (Grown outside)

- Yellow Crooknecks are Jane's favourites
- Skye prefers light green 'Romanesco' types

Aubergines (Grown in the polytunnel)

- 'Little Fingers' – 4-5 inches long, green at top and deep purple colour
- 'Fairy Tale' -- small, white and purple striped, sweet and delicious.

Cut Flowers

Tulips – 'Brown Sugar' (60cm, good scent) is her favourite. She plants 15,000 bulbs.

Sweet Peas – Jane is growing white varieties and experimenting colouring with vegetable dyes.

Roses

Chrysanthemums – favourites of Jane's include 'Allouise Pink', as the pink is a perfect shade against the sage-coloured foliage. She has finally grasped how to grow them well by pinching them out at the early rooted cutting stage so thinks this does add to her love of them.

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