



the buzz about organics

Retailers, wholesalers and growers discuss the state of organically grown flowers in our industry.

Our original premise with this month's question was to find out what kind of demand florists were experiencing for organically grown flowers, and we began in five major cities: New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, Houston and Los Angeles. Our interviews were notable for what we didn't find as well as what we did, and where we found information. We didn't find florists who were getting steady requests for organics (although we realize our cross-section is far from a valid statistical sampling), but we found the most interest from those on the West Coast. While most of those with whom we spoke in different segments of the industry thought we were a bit ahead of the curve, no one doubted that organically grown is the future direction for floral products.

"Organic flowers are hard to come by, and it's impossible to tell what imported flowers have been treated with. There are organizations that are trying to regulate this, and requests for organics strengthen the resolve to improve the situation. This year, half of the brides I work with are asking for organics. Brides are becoming more environmentally aware, and the number of flower customers who think that way is going to grow substantially."



— **MICHELLE TOMYUK**
A THOUSAND PETALS
TOPANGA, CALIF.

"Before I opened this shop in May, I consulted with my local wholesalers to find out how they were aligned with the organic and green movement. I plan to get more involved with organically grown flowers; I think it's going to become an important issue. I will also buy product from the local farmers and farmers' market. I want to know about the growing practices of my local growers and the philosophy and background of other floral product sources that I patronize."

— **LYNN FROST**
THE TUSCAN SUNFLOWER; BENNINGTON, VT.



"My shop specializes in high-end weddings and parties, and I'm just beginning to find sources for organic flowers. We weren't even talking about organic flowers a month ago, but now I'm hearing about green weddings. The problem is that [the flowers] are not available in large quantities. I will order organic flowers when my wedding season starts, but if the roses aren't top quality and large, I won't continue to use them."

— **LORETTA STAGEN**
LORETTA STAGEN FLORAL DESIGNS; STAMFORD, CONN.



"I don't see many florists sourcing organic flowers, and I'm in the San Francisco Bay area. Even the flower market in my area doesn't have them yet; you have to go to the farmers' market or health-food stores. We have to be open-minded about using organics and choose what's seasonal and local."

— **CORINA BECZNER**
VIBRANT EVENTS; OAKLAND, CALIF.



With all the consumer buzz about organic products, from supermarkets to high-end retailers, what are you experiencing in terms of customer demand for organically grown flowers?

"I started out as an organic grower about 10 years ago, and we received such a demand for our flowers, especially for weddings, that we opened a flower shop, Terra Bella, in Chico [Calif.]. This evolved into our Web site for organic flowers. Going organic is extremely complex, and we must provide a detailed paper trail, tracing the growth history of our product. We are USDA regulated, and both federal and state officials inspect our product and farm. Right now we grow flowers only for our Internet customers and local orders, but I foresee us selling to retailers in the future."

— **MARK KESSLER**
CALIFORNIAORGANICFLOWERS.COM; CHICO, CALIF.



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"I first learned about organic flowers when I worked on the FTD float for the 2007 Rose Parade. Organics are trendy and hip, and the Internet provides lots of interesting information about them that's not available elsewhere."

— **CHERRIE SILVERMAN,**
AIFD, AAF
CHERRY BLOSSOMS
WESTMINSTER, COLO.



"We've had only one retail request for organics, but we get numerous requests for edible flowers at one of our locations in a metropolitan area. Special-event planners and caterers seem to have more need for organics, and these are usually summer flowers that come from local growers who produce edible flowers. But exactly how do we define organically grown flowers? Does it mean that a registered pesticide has not been used on them, or have they been grown with an organic treatment or just grown naturally? There are many unanswered questions, and the label may not always refer to what you perceive as organic."

— **KATY MILLER**
DILLON FLORAL
CORPORATION
BLOOMSBURG, PA.



"We currently carry some 'green-label' products but not 100 percent. 'Green label' refers to various certification programs for flowers that are grown in an environmentally responsible manner. Green-label flowers can be more expensive because there's not a lot available, but more and more farmers and growers are working toward certification and aligning themselves with this movement. The majority of farms that we have visited in the United States, Colombia and Ecuador have social and environmental programs in place, and the negative portrait that is often painted in the media is contrary to the conditions we have observed."

— **CHUCK RICCARDI**
SEAGROATT FLORAL
COMPANY, ALBANY, N.Y.



sound off on creativity

Our "Hot Topic" question for September is: *Where do you get your design inspiration during times when you feel your creativity lagging? How do you recharge your creative batteries?*

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