

# GROWERTALKS

## Features

10/1/2024

## A Sweet Dream Realized

Jennifer Zurko



It was eight years ago when Marryn Mathis told her husband Scott that she needed to do something different with her life. Her son Finn was just born and the thought of going back to working on coding and tech systems for a health care provider didn't excite her at all. She always wanted to buy a farm and grow flowers. Scott, who works in construction, always wanted to build his own home. So they decided to meld their two dreams together.

*Pictured: Owned by Marryn and Scott Mathis, The Farmhouse Flower Farm in Stanwood, Washington, is*

*named for the traditional little white farmhouse situated on the property.*

*The little white house on the property of The Farmhouse Flower Farm was built in 1901. Marryn and Scott have plans in the works to start renovations. What is now a kitchen garden used to be where the pastor's cabin, built in 1864, was before it was donated to the local historical society.*

### From dream to reality

They had the dream, but needed the land, which in northwest Washington wasn't as easy to come by. Marryn and Scott first bought 5 acres of land on Camano Island, but it didn't have a house, so they lived in a trailer with an outhouse. They farmed the first two seasons at this location, but it wasn't the ideal situation—especially with a baby. So Marryn kept checking the local real estate sites for something better to come along. And one day it did.

Ten acres of land was available in the town of Stanwood, and not only did it actually have a house, but it had the traditional little white farmhouse that you see on postcards and paintings—exactly what Marryn and Scott were looking for.

That was five years ago, and since then Marryn said they've grown. But first they had to do a lot of improvements and renovations. For the previous owners, it was a horse farm, so Marryn said she had to work really hard to enrich the soil.

"It was like planting in concrete," she said.

*Pictured: Marryn showing me her current crop of dahlias. She offers 300 varieties of dahlias, growing 8,000 tubers every year, which sell out within 24 hours.*



The focus has been on getting the farm up and running.

Now the plan is to shift and have Scott start construction on the little white farmhouse. Built in 1901, the house was surrounded by some original buildings that Marryn and Scott donated to the local historical society, including a pastor's cabin that dated back to 1864. There have been some additions to the house over its 100-plus years, but one of those things was not a foundation, which they plan on adding when they begin remodeling.

## **Sweet peas (and more), please**

Of the 10 acres, Marryn farms on 3 acres, which also includes the greenhouses. Her business is primarily online where she sells cut flower and annuals seed all across the country. Most of the cut flower seed she sells is sweet peas (she grows a total of 32,000 sweet peas in 137 different varieties), but she also sells seed for salvias, rudbeckia, cosmos, strawflowers, cress, zinnias, anemones and gomphrena. And she offers 300 varieties of dahlias, growing 8,000 tubers every year, which sell out within 24 hours.

Marryn said the response to the farm and her seed business has been incredible.

"We found that people want to grow flowers themselves," she explained. "They like getting back to the basics, getting their hands dirty again and finding beauty in their own backyards."

It's a year-round operation with winter being a busy time of dividing tubers and bulbs, and overwintering anemones and ranunculus in the greenhouse. In the spring, Marryn has to get all of the sweet peas transplanted before her big dahlia tuber sale in March. She also grows 20,000 tulip bulbs that she offers fresh-cut in the spring.

For the past five years, it's been Marryn and Scott doing everything, but they'd just hired someone part time to help plan events and do some general office work.

"This year, it's not just about the flowers," said Marryn. "I've been so head down in building the farm and making our dream a reality. Now I'm giving myself the space to step back and decide if we stay small or scale to meet demand."



*Pictured: They may not look like it in this photo, but Marryn's dogs (from left) Huck, Charlie and Pearl work hard to keep the destructive deer away from the flowers in the field. "We don't say the D word," said Marryn. • Merle skipped his nap to make sure I wasn't a deer.*



For a small-ish, new-ish business, The Farmhouse Flower Farm's social media presence is pretty robust. Marryn is extremely active on their Instagram page, which she put to good use during the pandemic to promote her business and offered virtual workshops she called "Sweet Pea School." It included a history about sweet peas, information about the different varieties and tips on how to grow them from seed.

She had people from over 26 countries attend her Sweet Pea School and they enjoyed it so much that a couple of her "students" encouraged her to write a book. So she stepped out of her comfort zone and wrote "Sweet Pea School: Growing & Arranging the Garden's Most Romantic Blooms," which comes out in February 2025.

Marryn does hold a few events on the farm, like "Dinner in the Dahlias" and "Dessert in the Dahlias." Over 90% of her orders are shipped, but she does

allow local customers to come and pick them up at the farm. They're the lucky ones who get a glimpse of where their seed comes from in the rows and rows of beautiful flowers.

"I love making somebody's day and making them smile," said Marryn. "I mean, who gets to do that? I consider myself very lucky."

## A fulfilling decision

Marryn said that leaving the corporate world was "the best decision I've ever made. You couldn't pay me a million dollars to go back to what I was doing before." And having the farm allows her to spend time with her two boys, Maverick (9) and Finn (now 8), who love to work with her, harvesting and planting. (Finn has even earned some fame starring in some of the videos on their Instagram page.)

"My cup is filled in a way I can't put into words. I've never worked harder in my whole life, but I've never been more fulfilled," said Marryn. "I'm a firm believer that if you're passionate about something it will come through in what you're doing. We're not just growing flowers because we have to. We're growing flowers because we want to." **GT**