This isn't spam, it's Bloom Beat, for fresh-cut flower growers!

Crop culture and commentary for fresh-cut flower growers

GROWERTALKS MAGAZINE greenPROFIT MAGAZINE

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BLOOM BEAT

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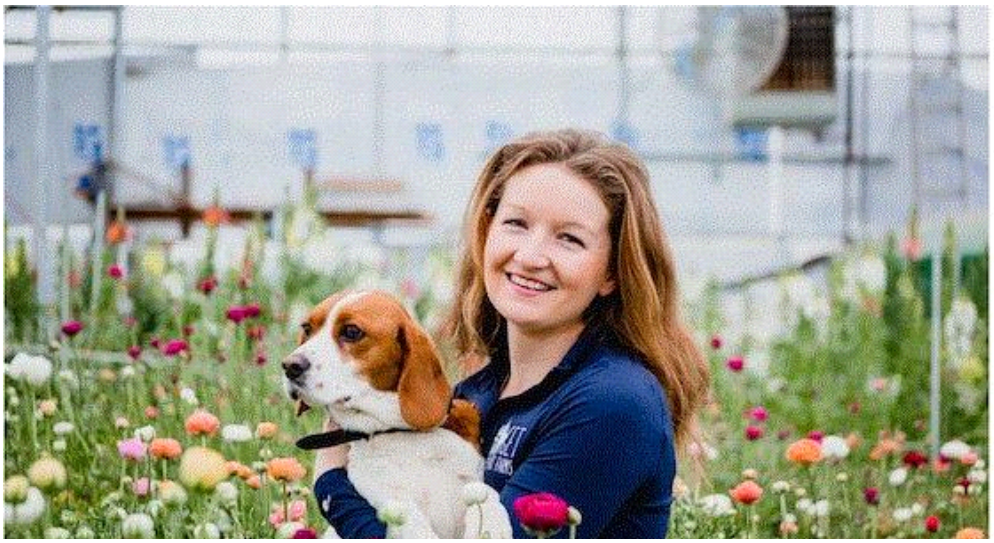
COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Welcome to Bloom Beat!

Hello, fellow cut flower fanatics! Welcome to the first edition (of what I hope to be thousands) of *Bloom Beat*! Now, before you hit the delete key and curse me for spamming you, let me give you the *Bloom Beat* elevator pitch:

My name is Lindsay and I'm a city-girl-turned-flower-farmer. My beloved beagle mix, Tater, and I own Forget Me Not Farms in Ottawa Lake, Michigan. We harvest our cut flowers from February through October each year, and 2022 will be our sixth season growing stellar blooms.

We're a wholesale-only farm. Tater and I sell to florists in northwest Ohio and southeast Michigan. We have just shy of a half an acre of heated greenhouses, and grow an additional acre of perennials and annuals outdoors each season.



In each edition of *Bloom Beat,* we'll show you our favorite flower varieties, farm hacks, employee management tips and so much more. Tater and I will also share our successes and some of the mishaps that happen on the farm. My hope is that you can use our experiences to your benefit and increase the profitability of your farm.

My editor is Chris Beytes of Ball Publishing, which publishes *GrowerTalks* and *Green Profit* magazines, plus a whole host of horticultural newsletters, including his own, *Acres Online*, along with Paul Pilon's excellent *Perennial Pulse*, Ellen Wells' *Buzz!* retail garden center newsletter, Dr. JC Chong's *PestTalks*, and many more. My focus in *Bloom Beat* (which will come to you for free twice a month … unless you unsubscribe … but please don't!) will be on how to be more successful at growing and selling your fresh-cut flowers.

With all of that being said, let's talk shop!

Be sure to order your summer seeds!

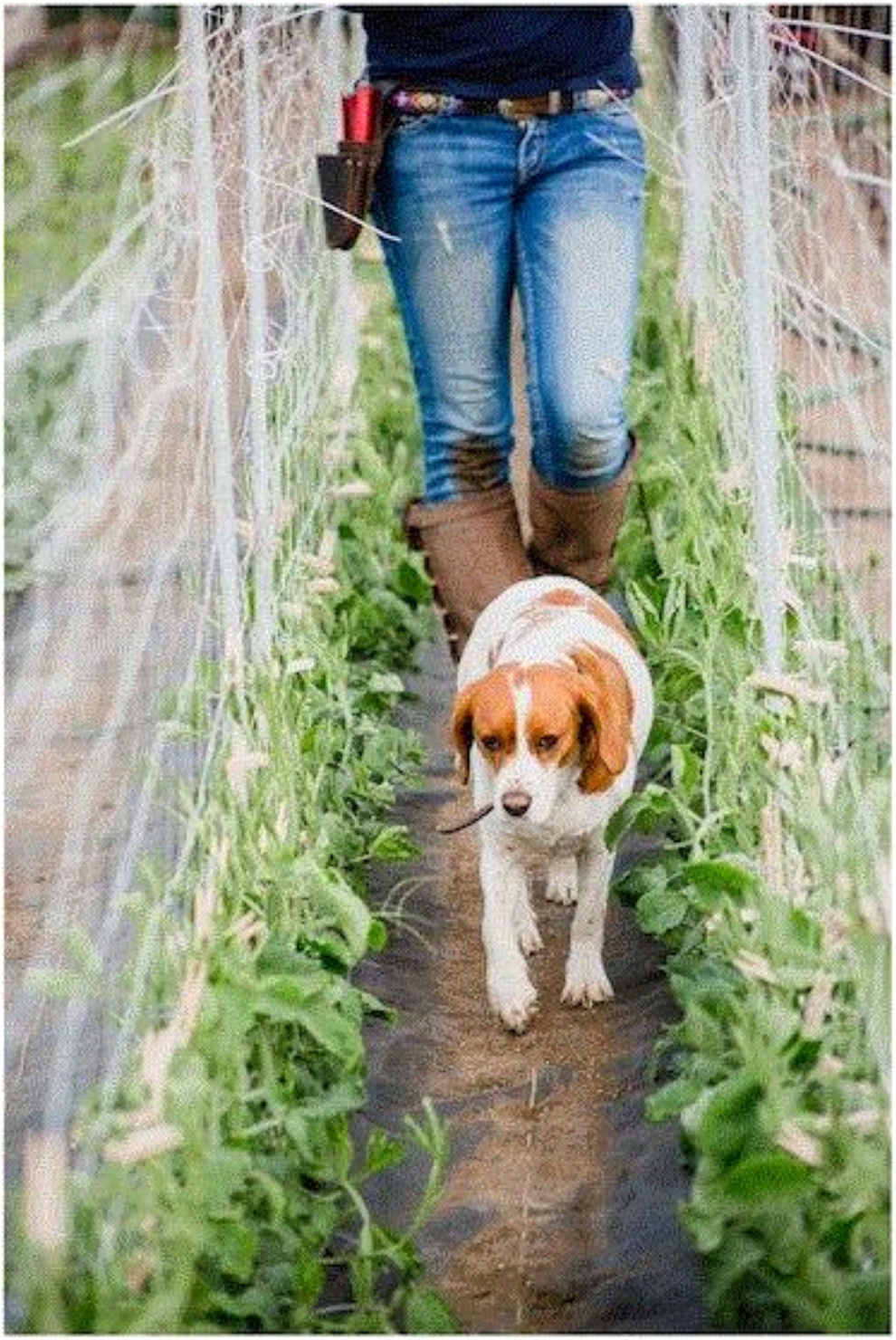
Tater and I relish the start of the new year. We've received countless seed catalogs in the mail since November. During the holidays, we pour over the catalogs and make our wish lists. For those of you who haven't ordered your summer seeds yet, I urge you to do so. As many of you know, there are material shortages and horticulture suppliers are no exception. I changed my order habit for the 2022 summer growing season. In the past, I would order in batches. This year, I ordered all my summer annual seeds I need for my succession plantings all in one sitting.

I urge you to order all your seeds in a timely fashion. The demand for local flowers the last two years is out of this world and I anticipate 2022 to be another year for the record books. Last season, Tater and I learned the hard way that you can't sell flowers you don't have. And if you don't have the seeds then you most certainly can't grow the flowers. Take the time this week to finalize your production schedule for the summer and place your seed order.

You work hard for your flowers, so be sure they're profitable!

I think the 2022 season has the potential to be one of your most lucrative seasons yet. Be sure profitability is in the forefront of your planning for your next crop cycle. Resources and labor are finite, so maximize your effort and your profit. One of the planning tools Tater and I find helpful on the farm is this Greenhouse Cost of Production spreadsheet, developed by the floriculture team at Michigan State University.

Even if you don't grow under cover, the spreadsheet can be tailored for field production.



Sweet pea production (and pretty pix)

In every edition of *Bloom Beat*, we'll share some of the major tasks we have going on at the farm,

along with some breathtaking photos of our crops (shot by Aaron Iffland of Blue Stone Photographs). This time, it's all about sweet peas*.

The Forget Me Not crew and I planted our Spencer Sweet Peas in our unheated tunnel in the last week of December. Whenever we plant sweet peas, I feel like spring is near. Spring is my favorite flower season on the farm, mainly because of the sweet peas. They were the first flower I fell in love with growing on my own. Their delicate petals, intoxicating fragrance and rainbow colors got me hooked. I was bound and determined to have them for as long as I could.

**Editor's note: Interestingly, sweet peas was probably the first crop George J. Ball grew when he founded Ball Horticultural Company (of which Ball Publishing is a division) back in 1905. He even published a book, "Better Sweet Peas," around 1930.*

Little did I know that sweet peas are the epitome of a seasonal specialty cut flower. The challenge with specialty cut flower farming is that when you make a mistake on certain crops, such as the sweet peas, you have to wait almost an entire year to try them again. After some hard lessons and glimmers of success, Tater and I finally cracked the code, and now sweet peas are one of the rock stars of our spring season. Customers love sweet peas and they can be very difficult to source from abroad, which makes them a hot item for a flower farm to offer.

If you can achieve stem lengths over 18 in., you'll leave quite the impression with your florist customers. If you're retailing, sweet peas in a mason jar are the perfect dose of childhood nostalgia (and stem length isn't nearly as critical!).

In the hope of saving you some of my same heartbreak in the first few years, here's the nitty gritty on sweet peas:

Sweet peas value cold and time. They can be sown in the fall or spring depending on where you farm. We order our seeds from Owl's Acre Seed and Rodger Parsons Sweet Peas, both in the UK. There are new domestic sweet pea seed suppliers such as Floret Flower Farm, Ardelia Farm and The Farmhouse Flower Farm. Since our sweet pea seeds are imported, we order in late August or early September, and receive the seeds in October. When you order seed from outside the country, remember you need to allow plenty of lead time for shipping.

Once we receive the shipment, the team and I sow them right away into 50-cell plug trays. They value low temperatures to develop a robust root system, which is why we put them in the last greenhouse to be heated. We cover the sweet peas with Agribon row cover when outside temperatures are below 25F. They can tolerate temperatures around 20F, but we like to err on the side of caution. There's a fine line between tolerance and suffering when it comes to cold-grown flowers.

In my experience, the vines yield longer stems for a longer period of time when they're in the greenhouse. Tater and I award the sweet peas greenhouse space since we receive a premium for long stems.

No matter where you're located, sweet peas need cool temperatures to reduce vegetative growth and develop their root systems. Sweet peas that are deeply rooted have better tolerance of temperature changes. Sweet pea vines do not like temperatures above 70F for extended periods of time. Temperatures over 80F stress the vine, and cause bud drop and shorter stems for weeks to come.

Well-established sweet peas may recover from a short period of heat stress with many thorough waterings, although it's hard to tell when or if the vines will produce long stems again, depending on when the heat occurs in the production cycle. Keep very detailed notes on the daily high temperatures and document how the plants respond. Thankfully, we don't experience many extreme temperature swings during our growing period between March and the middle of May. Cool and consistent temperatures, bright light, and consistent deep waterings yield extremely long stems.

For those of you who are located in milder climates, you can sow sweet peas in January and plant them in the field early in the spring. I've read that some farmers direct-sow their sweet peas in the field, but if you have a high rodent pressure you need to protect them. Young, succulent, sweet pea shoots are like caviar to field mice. Colder-climate growers can plant sweet peas in the field as well, and although your stem length may be reduced, you can harvest flowers with tendrils to make up the difference.

So if you don't have your seeds ordered, hop to it! In our next edition of *Bloom Beat* we'll go over all our favorite sweet pea series and the photoperiodic nuances of each one.

By the way, if you grow sweet peas, too, Tater and I want to hear about your experiences or challenges. Email us at LDaschner@ballpublishing.com.

Correcting iron deficiency in your crop

Iron is one of the essential micronutrients for plant growth. Iron is one of the key players in chlorophyll production, and as you can imagine, plants that can't produce chlorophyll struggle to thrive. That's why treating iron deficiency as soon as it's diagnosed is critical.

Iron deficiency in plants is often expressed as upper leaf interveinal chlorosis. The leaf tissue between the veins turns yellow while the veins remain green. It's caused by high pH substrates or substrates staying too wet for an extended period.

Applying iron chelate is one quick solution to green up the plants. However, if the iron deficiency is due to high alkalinity, you'll need to remedy the soil conditions so that the plants can uptake iron.

HERE is a quick review by e-GRO on how to apply iron chelate on iron-deficient crops.

If you want more information on identifying and treating interveinal chlorosis, here's an e-GRO ALERT on interveinal chlorosis on gerberas. It's a good publication to keep handy when you need it.

In closing …

That's a wrap on this first edition of *Bloom Beat*. I truly believe locally grown flowers are the way of the future and the demand for our products will only grow for years to come. If you want to see more of what's going on at the farm, check out our Instagram @forgetmenotfarmsmi. And if there's a cut flower topic you'd like us to write about, drop Tater and me a line at LDaschner@ballpublishing.com.

We look forward to connecting with you!

Thanks for reading! Until next time,

Lindsay Daschner (and Tater)
Editor-at-Large—*Bloom Beat*
Owner—Forget-Me-Not Farms

This email was received by 2,787 of your fellow fresh-cut flower growers!

If you're interested in advertising in *Bloom Beat*, contact **Kim Brown** ASAP and she'll hook you up.