

# GROWERTALKS

## Under an Acre

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### A Passion for Open Pastures

*Anne-Marie Hardie*



Childhood for Lindsey Easton was partially defined by the beauty and wonders of the outdoors. She has fond memories of visiting her grandparent's dairy farm, which was surrounded by 500 acres of both farmland and open fields, and her own childhood home set in the country. Growing up in Ohio, for Lindsey, farming was a regular part of life. Like many of her childhood friends, Lindsey's high school job was working for a local family, where she helped both in their greenhouse and local farm stand. It was

here that Lindsey began to learn about all aspects of growing and farm life.

With an eye for beauty, Lindsey majored in art in college with a specialization in interior design. She began her career applying techniques in how to create beautiful homes, and with a booming housing industry, Florida was the perfect place for this. Despite her love for interior design, Lindsey was dismayed by the fact that more and more Florida ranches were being sold to make room for new construction and subdivisions.

"It really wasn't until I moved away from Ohio to Florida and was surrounded by concrete that I found that I missed the agriculture," said Lindsey.

Now with two children of her own, the call to reconnect with nature has become even louder. In a world that's increasingly become master planned, Lindsey wanted to create a space where nature thrived. Her dream was to create a rural area that would serve to reconnect both her own family and her community to a natural living space. Instead of lamenting about the lack of green space in her community, Lindsey took action, converting a portion of her 20-acre property in Wimauma, Florida, to grow cut flowers.

Lindsey's hope was to provide her community with a selection of flowers that were increasingly being brought in from abroad. Most of the cut floral industry has moved overseas, limiting the selection to varieties that can

survive over 1,000 miles in a cardboard box. Lindsey wanted to offer her community flowers that may have been planted in “your grandmother’s garden,” but that much of the population has forgotten because these flowers are rarely seen.

The cut flower farm, L. Easton and Co., is really a family affair. Her husband Kenny’s full time job is as a firefighter, but on the days that he’s home, he provides much needed man power. While amongst the beds, 3-year-old Alden tours his toy dump trucks and 6-year-old Ammarae proudly helps plant the larger seeds.

“They understand what we are doing. Now it’s just a matter of showing them that this is our lifestyle,” said Lindsey. “It takes constant work, but for them to see these things blooming that they helped plant, I think that’s worth its weight in gold.”

For Lindsey, choosing to grow cut flowers was a perfect fit pairing her interior design education with her love of horticulture.

“It’s a good marriage between the cut flowers; they still allow me to be creative, with the colors and textures and all that,” said Lindsey. “But I can still instill an agricultural farming childhood to our children.”

With a climate that allows yearlong growth, Lindsey has two main growing seasons, beginning seeds in February and October. Currently, the entire crop consists of annuals, including sweet peas, dahlias, delphiniums, anemones and snapdragons. To compensate for the tropical rain, everything is grown in a raised bed and planted in landscape fabric. This fabric not only suppresses the weeds, but allows Lindsey to quickly figure out the spacing requirements of the plants and have a more accurate estimate of yields.

In addition to the annuals, the Easton family is beginning to add woody plants that will be used as cuts to add both unique foliage and blooming branches to the bouquets. Lindsey’s hope is to add a cutting orchard that will include several trees unique to the Florida landscape such as olives, kumquats and persimmons.

Local is key, particularly since the cut flower industry in Florida is sorely lacking.

“It has kind of made it a challenge for me because I would love to bounce some ideas off of people that are in my growing zone, but they are not there,” said Lindsey. Instead she had to be resourceful, joining associations like the ASCFG (Association of Specialty Cut Flowers Grower), where a recent conference in Georgia helped connect Lindsey to a supportive community of growers.

“The association has connected me with a group of female farmers, that have been very helpful to bounce ideas off of,” said Lindsey.

The learning curve in the first year was steep, where Lindsey not only had to learn the needs of the plants, but how to adapt to the unique climate of her Florida home. Equipped with several questions from how to get taller plants to controlling the bloom time, Lindsey has begun the journey of learning the ins and outs of cut flower growing in Florida.

“It’s blood, sweat and tears without a doubt. Farming is hard work, but if you want that lifestyle, you have to

keep going,” said Lindsey.

With a population that seems to be expanding exponentially, Lindsey hopes to maintain that sense of a small farming community within her family’s backyard. Today, L. Easton and Company’s cut flowers can be found in the Tampa Bay farmer’s market and a few specialty shops. Lindsey’s hope is to expand her farm to be able to supply additional local florists and get her foot into the whole foods market. She also dreams of her farm becoming that go-to place for either a nice day out or an escape from the concrete.

An artistic creative person, Lindsey would love to see the farm expand to include a shop where she could not only sell fresh cut flowers, but other items that depicts that homestead lifestyle. **GT**

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