

A BLOOMING BUSINESS



(<https://3mkexo1awrr142xt3225zmp8-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Cross-Street-5.20.2017-1-of-1-3-e1502986087504.jpg>)

Friendship and flowers grow at Cross Street Flower Farm in Norwell.

By Cheryl Fenton | Photography by Lynne Karo

Paris-based 20th-century writer Gertrude Stein believed a rose is a rose. Norwell residents Nikki Bartley and Cara Gilmartin beg to differ. The owners of **Cross Street Flower Farm** (<http://www.crossstreetflowerfarm.com>), they appreciate the unique beauty

of each heirloom bloom—a parrot tulip's fringed and feathered petals, the ombré effect of a tightly packed ranunculus and a ball dahlia's bold globe. In fact, roses aren't even on the growing menu (although they might be one day). Instead, Bartley and Gilmartin think outside the flower box with more than 50 varieties of specialty cut flowers. There are salmon rose zinnias, Italian colibri poppies, Madame Butterfly snapdragons and anemone peonies.

Bartley and Gilmartin have plenty of distinctive varieties to keep their hands happy in the dirt at their organic, sustainable flower farm. Using hand tools and a walk-behind tractor, they farm 1.5 acres of land, including a half-acre at [Norwell Farms](http://www.norwellfarms.org/) (<http://www.norwellfarms.org/>), as well as in a heated 28-foot-long tunnel greenhouse at Bartley's house.

<https://3mkexo1awrr142xt3225zmp8-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/cross-street-1-of-1-14.jpg>

All Cross Street flowers are grown without the use of pesticides, herbicides or synthetic fertilizers. This extra effort results in the best blossoms.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (<https://www.usda.gov/>), nearly 80 percent of all flowers sold in the United States are imported. "Many of those flowers are grown in poor working conditions, bathed in chemicals and have been out of water for days," explains Gilmartin. "Our flowers literally go from our chemical-free fields straight to water and then straight to homes. They smell better, last longer and the colors are more saturated."

Gilmartin and Bartley aim to be good stewards of the land that they farm by nurturing and protecting the flowers from pests naturally. "Our kids play on the fields where we grow and our customers touch our flowers so we make a conscious choice to avoid using pesticides or herbicides," explains Bartley.

Prior to starting the business, both women had banking careers. In 2010, Bartley helped to found Norwell Farms' community supported agriculture (CSA) and it was then, she says, that she caught the "farming bug." After chairing the board and eventually apprenticing in the fields, she decided to try her hand at cultivating flowers on the 1/8-acre plot of land in her front yard. She enlisted the help of her friend Gilmartin, who is now her lead floral designer.



"I feel at home with my hands in the dirt, surrounded by nature," says Bartley. "I am in awe of the complexity and astounding beauty of the flowers we grow. We are all so busy and disconnected from farming and nature. Our society needs that connection to be healthy. Flowers have a healing power just like healthy food does."

Just as one would receive fruit and veggie bundles through a local farm's CSA program, Cross Street offers flower shares from April to October. Customers can pick up a weekly or bi-weekly bouquet at Norwell Farms, [Sadie Mae's Cupcake Cafe](http://www.sadiemaescupcakecafe.com/) (<http://www.sadiemaescupcakecafe.com/>) in Hingham or [The Foodsmith](http://www.thefoodsmithduxbury.com/) (<http://www.thefoodsmithduxbury.com/>) in Duxbury, or have them delivered. This year's spring share sold out quicker than you can say, "tiptoe through the tulips," and they've sold most of the summer and fall shares. You can also find their flowers at the [Hingham Farmers Market](http://www.hinghamfarmersmarket.org/) (<http://www.hinghamfarmersmarket.org/>).



<https://3mkexo1awrr142xt3225zmp8-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Cross-Street-4.29.2017-1-of-1-4.jpg> Bartley and Gilmartin spend the winter months strategizing so that in the summer they can focus on farming. In January, they begin the greenhouse and outdoor tunnel planting, and they start planting the fields in early April. "We succession-plant most crops several times over the course of the season to keep a steady supply of beautiful flowers," explains Bartley.

All of their know-how is homegrown from research and chats with other farmers. The women joined the New England Flower Farming and Floral Group and are members of the [Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers](http://www.ascfg.org/) (<http://www.ascfg.org/>), which Bartley calls a "tremendous resource for flower farmers." A recent intensive three-day flower farming workshop in Washington state "probably put us three seasons ahead in our knowledge level," she adds.

Looking ahead is something Bartley and Gilmartin do well. When they saw a need for fresh-cut wedding flowers, they added a custom floral design side of the business. South Shore brides can now purchase bouquets of locally grown blooms. Cross Street also offers DIY flower buckets for arranging your own centerpieces and heirloom flower seedling packets for at-home gardens.



There are future dreams of a storefront and more land, but these women also want to tend to their own roots in Norwell. Family always comes first. "Farming is messy and so is life," says Bartley. "Cara and I are perfectionists, but farming requires speed, patience and a sense of humor. We depend on each other. As busy mothers of six kids between us, there's no way we could do it alone."

It's this family life that Gilmartin credits with their business success. "As mothers, there's something innate in us to want to nurture. There's so much happiness and joy in growing and sharing flowers. I'm not sure I would feel the same way growing vegetables."

Her kids would probably agree.

More snapshots from our photoshoot at Cross Street Flowers Farm:

