Blooming lovely for your well-being

Surrounded by fields of beautiful British blooms, *Prime* chats to Roz Chandler, British flower farmer, owner of Field Gate Flowers, and bestselling author

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After two years during which we have all spent more time gardening than ever before, the job of a full-time flower farmer sounds idyllic, doesn't it? Imagine, waking up every day to the enchantment of seeing what's new, what's budded or bloomed overnight, and deciding what's ready to cut and arrange. For Roz Chandler, owner of the rather wonderful Field Gate Flowers, this dream is a reality, borne out of a spontaneous decision to take a one-day course in growing your own flower patch for cutting.

Meeting with Roz at her gloriously beautiful flower farm in Milton Keynes really is something special – and it's here we spend some time, amongst the flowers, learning more about her incredible life and wonderful business. Of course, it's not all walks among the roses for Roz, who still manages every aspect of the business, but flower farming is still something she's never thought she'd end up doing. Having completed a degree in Environmental Science, Roz's career path has been varied and exciting. From living the life of a Club 18-30s holiday rep, to dwelling on a Greek island, to international events management and digital marketing, she has a wealth of experience and skills, all of which have come into their own as part of the development of Field Gate Flowers.

Having bought an "almost derelict" house with five acres of land in 2007, Roz happened upon a one-day course that covered the basics of growing flowers for cutting. She headed home, planted three 3m x 1m beds, and within a few months, swathes of beautiful flowers were fully bloomed and ready for cutting.

"My first beds were actually a massive success," Roz says. "I thought 'I can do this, I'm quite good' – and it grew from there. Excuse the pun" Three flower beds turned into six, which were soon complemented by polytunnels, before the business expanded over the entirety of the land. Starting with bouquets for local delivery and wedding arrangements, the Field Gate style of naturally arranged, beautiful seasonal flowers was quickly picked up on by those seeking a boho wedding theme or something altogether more sustainable and eco-friendlier.

And once word spread about Roz's beautiful, naturally scented, seasonal flowers, things really began to take off.

But, before we go any further, it would be remiss of us not to mention how the business came to be named Field Gate Flowers because the fable of the naming brings even more magic to the story.

"My children say I took the name from channelling Winnie the Pooh," Roz tells us while adding that her nickname has always been Pooh because she's such a big fan of the classic character.

"In the film Christopher Robin, Pooh and Christopher are sat on a train. Pooh is playing his own game, naming the things he sees; 'field, cow, train' etc. My children are convinced that the business name comes from me staring out of the bedroom window and seeing a field, a gate, and some flowers. I'm honestly not sure if that is true, but the name does reflect the business."

Working with a "really good, strong team" of RHS-trained horticulturalists and talented florists, Roz now produces floral displays for all events and occasions, using British-grown flowers and foraged local foliage, which complements the strong environmental ethos of the brand.

Now, in 2022 the business has surpassed 11,000 followers on Instagram and has a bit of a cult-following thanks to appearances in *Vogue*, *The Express* and *Homes & Gardens* magazine. There's also the Field Gate Flowers podcast, online courses, and a bestselling book *Seed to Vase*, which documents a journey that involves so much more than growing flowers. Based upon the online course of the same name which took place in 2021, the book is filled with stories about the lives and experiences of course participants and what growing a cutting patch brought to them. Participants came together from all corners of the UK, USA, and Europe to join an eight-month course on growing cut flowers. From homes in many acres in Scotland to apartment blocks in London with rented raised beds, they all had a common love of flowers.

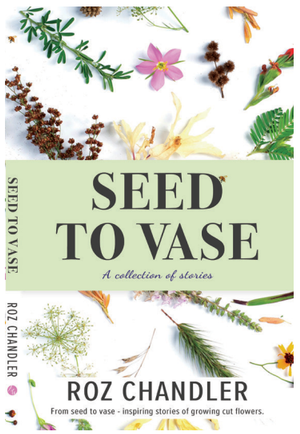
Through the course, they learned not only how to grow cut flowers, but a great deal about themselves and one another. They found a community in which they all found inspiration and confidence, regardless of their initial reasons for joining the course. *Seed to Vase* includes stories of bereavement, sadness, joy, and laughter at a time when the world was facing restrictions in so many ways due to Covid-19. This was a time to rediscover nature and the simple joys in life.

"My proudest moments are when I receive letters in the post to say the courses, we offer have changed lives," says Roz. "I recently had a lady on one of my courses who had lost her 21-year-old daughter in a horrific accident. I saw her a few days ago and she told me how I'd changed her life, how her allotment and our course had been her saviour – it's things like that make me proud."

We here at *Prime* are huge fans of the Seed to Vase course, which started again in spring 2022. With the aim of creating British flower beds in every garden, the course really is a treat, ending with you creating your own display of beautiful, pesticide-free flowers that smell divine. After completing the course, you'll never buy cut flowers again. Roz is passionate about cutting back on the importing of flowers to the UK from Africa via Europe. Her dream is that everyone in the UK grows their own flowers, reducing the requirement to fly in flowers, all the while helping cut air miles and encouraging increasing biodiversity here in Britain.

"The Seed to Vase course is suitable for anyone, regardless of how much space they have. We have people who live in an apartment in London and have a little space on the roof and people with acres in Scotland. It doesn't matter what size space you have because once you have the skills, it's all scalable.

"I really want to make the point that anyone can do it," the wonderful Roz adds as we wind up.



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