

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

## How to make picking wedding flowers a little less wasteful

Tulips in spring. Sunflowers in summer. We tell you which flowers are in season throughout the year to help you make more sustainable choices.



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Between bouquets, boutonnieres, and ceremony and reception arrangements, many weddings are overflowing with flowers. But this abundance of blooms can come at [a cost to the planet](#).

In the United States, [about 80 percent](#) of fresh cut flowers are imported, with much coming from countries such as Colombia and Ecuador. Before they become part of your special day, these blossoms are often subject to [an emissions-heavy journey](#) involving heated greenhouses, refrigerated trucks and airplanes. One 2020 analysis of products sold in British grocery stores found that a bouquet of imported flowers produced 71 pounds of carbon dioxide equivalent — about 80 percent more than an eight-ounce steak raised on deforested land in Brazil.

But there's one simple way to festoon your nuptials — or any occasion — with flowers more sustainably: Choose blooms that are in season and sourced locally, experts say.

“You can have loads of flowers and enjoy them and have very little impact,” said Rita Feldmann, founder of the [Sustainable Floristry Network](#), an Australia-based independent educational organization for florists.

## Seasonal flowers are better for the planet

Sourcing flowers based on what's in season and readily growing around you can help avoid the need to create artificial conditions to meet growing requirements and cut down on transportation costs, Feldmann said.

Flowers that are not in season were likely grown in a heated greenhouse or brought in from abroad, guzzling energy and resources in the process, said David Bek, who leads the [Sustainable Cut-Flowers Project](#), a research initiative in the U.K.

“Local and seasonal flowers greatly reduce impacts, especially if they are produced organically,” he said.


## The best wedding flowers to choose, by season

Here are some examples of [what types of flowers and other plants are in season](#) throughout the year, according to Certified American Grown, a nonprofit trade association:

### Spring

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Tulips, daffodils, peonies and lilacs

 **Summer**

Sunflowers, zinnias, dahlias and delphiniums

 **Fall**

Dahlias, chrysanthemums and asters

 **Winter**

Evergreens, anemones and hellebores

## Seasonal flowers support local farmers

Using domestic flowers also has the added benefit of supporting farmers in your area, said Amy Stewart, author of “[Flower Confidential](#),” a 2007 book about the global flower industry.

Smaller local farms, for instance, could have periods during the year where they don’t have food crops to bring to market. “Being able to bring flowers in kind of helps keep them afloat,” Stewart said. “We all want our local farmers to be able to stay afloat.”

While these flowers can be more expensive than imported blooms grown by large-scale farms in South America, the differences in cost are typically associated with labor, said Debra Prinzing, founder of the [Slow Flowers Society](#), a U.S.-based group that advocates for the use of local, domestic and seasonal flowers.

“We want our farmers to make a living wage, and we should consider other factors besides price alone, including freshness and quality of locally grown flowers,” she said.

If you decide to use imported flowers, Feldmann recommended looking for ones that come with a level of certification. These programs, such as the [Rainforest Alliance](#), [Flor Ecuador](#) and [Veriflora](#), aim to create standards for farming and workers in the industry.

## Seasonal flowers feel more special

There are a host of other benefits to choosing seasonal and local flowers for your wedding.

These flowers can be more unusual, or ephemeral and delicate. You’ll also probably be using them when they’re at their peak.

“It’s similar to eating tomatoes when they are late-summer perfect — the experience is elevated,” Feldmann said. “In the same way, when flowers are at their freshest, they resonate with a special vitality.”

Seasonal flowers can also add more meaning to your wedding day.

“Wouldn’t it be beautiful to use flowers, or carry flowers, or decorate with flowers that are unique to that date on the calendar and the place where they were grown?” Prinzing said.

But she and other experts emphasized that you should plan ahead and be flexible with your wedding florals. Try not to become fixated on a particular look with specific flowers. Instead, experts recommend telling your local florist what your general vision is and letting them provide options of seasonal and domestic flowers that could fit.

## More wedding flower tips

If your wedding date is during a time of year when your favorite flower isn’t in season or there are generally fewer choices for fresh blossoms, dried flowers can be another option. Keep in mind that these flowers are different from those that have been preserved or otherwise treated with synthetic products.

“Dried flowers are experiencing a revival,” Feldmann said.

“If you have your heart set on a particular variety, then get married when that flower is in season locally,” she added. “The minute we start demanding out-of-season blooms, emissions increase.”

Another tip: Try to avoid using floral foam, the green blocks often found in flower arrangements. They’re usually a type of single-use plastic that ends up as waste. There are some alternatives to foam, including chicken wire or flower frogs, spiky metal floral arranging tools typically used in Japanese ikebana. Or experts say you can opt to go simpler with your floral designs.

“The reality is flowers are happiest in a vase of water,” Feldmann said.