



Many Graces Farm and Design

Rebecca Maillet's love of flowers is something that, quite frankly, bloomed over the years.

Her appreciation for nature as a child and her attraction to flowers as she grew older led to her vision for Many Graces, a commercial production flower farm, as well as a full-service floral design studio.

"I grew up in the woods and my childhood was filled with creating beauty through nature ... collecting objects from the woods such as pine cones and leaves and pressing flowers," Maillet said about her penchant for Mother Nature's gifts.

Her draw to flowers as a medicine and ritual was solidified during the years she cared for her beloved friend Ruth, who was diagnosed with cancer in the winter of 2013 and later passed away in 2015.

During that time, they nurtured each other through a daily ritual of surprising one another with flowers. The home that they shared had what they dubbed a small "secret garden." It was filled with colorful perennial and biennial flowers, and they would often make their way to its beautiful bed to make little bouquets that they would lovingly place on each other's bedside table.

After Ruth passed away, Maillet wanted to maintain her connection to flowers and in 2016 she approached a local farmer asking if she could grow flowers on a small plot of

land in the back of his field. She began selling flowers under the umbrella of his vegetable farm and within a few years it had ballooned into a burgeoning cut flower business.

Faced with her success and the desire to build upon what she had created, Maillet knew she would need more land. She turned to Michael Docter, a well-known area farmer and landlord, for help and became the proud renter of a 5.5 acre, certified-organic field in Hadley, thus Many Graces was born in 2018. Lovingly named "the lower meadow," the hidden field is situated at the bottom of a wooded hill, surrounded by forests abutting the Connecticut River.

While all of this was happening, Maillet was pursuing a doctorate in English literature from UMass Amherst, where she was also teaching undergraduate classes on the subject.

"I soon realized that my vision to complete my degree while running a small business was unrealistic. I was already working on my dissertation, but decided to speak with my advisor about the dilemma — that I was thinking more about the farm than my doctorate. She was an amazing advisor, who was with me from the beginning of my academic journey at UMass, and her advice was to follow my passion. So, I left the program in 2019 to devote my efforts solely to the farm," Maillet said.

"We are committed to sustainably with a mission that is built upon always working for the well-being of the



earth, as well as our dedicated staff, and to showcase to the community that local flowers are luxurious,” she added.

Flashback one year to 2018 when Kel Komenda, the farm’s managing director — whose background is in furniture making and interior design — met and started dating Maillet.

“I became a volunteer at the farm helping after hours. Rebecca was incredibly busy and at the time it was the only way I could see her. By 2020 things were changing with the onset of COVID-19 and the shutdown, which affected a good part of our business involving the event industry. So, I became a full-time volunteer helping with ways to save the farm,” Komenda said.

“First generation farming is very expensive if you don’t inherit a working farm. We started from the ground-up, it was sweat equity. There was equipment needed and no infrastructure, no water, electricity, greenhouses, and no building to process the flowers. With my building background, I built the farm’s first high tunnel greenhouse and later two others as well as a small processing shed. We don’t have decades of experience and continue to learn every day - reading and doing our research and reaching out to other farmers for advice when needed,” they added.

High tunnel greenhouses provide farmers with a way to lengthen their growing season and increase their crop yield by planting in-ground and protecting flowers from low temperature and the elements.

Now entering their sixth growing season, Many Graces plants more than 750 varieties of flowers — Dahlias, Ranunculus, Poppies, Eucalyptus, Anemones, Delphinium, Lisianthus, Sunflowers, Snapdragons, Strawflower, Roses and Celosia to mention just a very few — on their 5.5-acre farm and an additional 1.5-acre rented land also in Hadley.

They reserve one-third of their farm to custom-grown flowers solely for their wedding clients. Also, their plantings always include a variety of crops for drying, which helps to keep staff, some 13 at times, with them during off-season to make dried arrangements and wreaths for the holidays.

“During the height of our growing season from mid-April through mid-October, we source from our own farm for customers. If we need to supplement a project with other flowers, we only do so from responsible local producers,” Maillet said, adding there are times usually off-season when they need to order roses from California or Oregon.

In addition to picking up the phone or going online to order flowers for delivery or pickup, Many Graces numerous services include:

- Floral Design for Special Events including weddings, birthday parties, showers, bar mitzvahs, anniversaries and more.
- House Accounts for whom one of their designers travels to someone’s home to gain an appreciation of its aesthetics before creating custom floral arrangements to be delivered once or twice per month or even once per week.

- Flower Subscriptions providing one seasonal bouquet, choose to join for three, six or eight months from May through December.
- Floral Installations for Local Businesses to beautify their storefronts and more.
- Flowers for your Home Garden when every spring the farm offers cutting garden plant starts and dahlia tubers for their local home gardeners.
- Workshops, featuring classes on how to design with flowers, making evergreen wreaths and many other topics to be expanded this year.
- DIY Buckets of Flowers for Special Events for people who want to “do it themselves.”

In late 2021, Many Graces expanded their reach and gained additional visibility with the opening of a flower shop in Thornes Marketplace in Northampton.

“It was a pop-up shop with an option to stay and lease space, which we did for the past year before closing at the end of February. We are moving to uptown Northampton where we will be consolidating our design studio and event space into a larger location. We’re excited because this will give us more autonomy and space to connect with the community,” Maillet said about their move to West Street near the new Smith College bookstore.

They expect to host their flower subscription pickups in April from the new location, as well as any flowers ordered online or by phone, with the goal of establishing regular retail hours by Mother’s Day.

As for the future, Komenda said additional goals, such as expanding their perennial offerings – which would further increase sales – will require finding and owning their own land, which would allow them more space for planting and the ability to develop a suitable infrastructure.

“Unfortunately, land in the Valley is not easy to come by, which is not a unique struggle for young farmers who are not set to inherit familial farm land. Also, there is a disconnect to what a farmer can afford and what the real estate market is commanding,” Komenda said.

Once again turning to their mission, Maillet said they want to encourage people to look to their local grower before purchasing flowers elsewhere.

“The carbon footprint of the global cut flower industry is awful. But growers like us are taking care of the earth and making a positive impact on local ecosystems. And, I believe the same mentality that people have about preferring to purchase organic food should be applied to flowers as well,” she said.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THEIR PROGRESS OR TO ORDER FLOWERS FOR PICKUP OR DELIVERY, CALL 413-570-4122 OR VISIT MANYGRACES.COM.

