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# Flower Confidential

The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful

Amy Stewart

author of *The Earth Moved*

## Flower Confidential by Amy Stewart

We lust after flowers. We buy more flowers a year than we do Big Macs. We use them to mark our most intimate moments and to express sentiments that might otherwise go unsaid. And we demand perfection. So it's no surprise that there is a forty-billion dollar industry devoted to making flowers flawless.

Amy Stewart takes us inside the flower trade—from the hybridizers who create new varieties in the laboratory, to the growers who produce millions of flowers in factory-like settings, to the Dutch auctioneers who set the

bar (and the price), and ultimately to the neighborhood florists orchestrating the mind-boggling demands of Valentine's and Mother's Day. There's the scientist intent on developing the first blue rose; an eccentric horticultural legend who created the world's most popular lily; a grower of gerbera daisies of every color imaginable; and the equivalent of a Tiffany diamond: the 'Forever Young' rose.

Stewart explores the relevance of flowers in our lives and in our history. In the process, she reveals all that has been gained—and lost—by tinkering with nature.

**Amy Stewart** is the winner of the 2005 California Horticultural Society Writer's Award and the recipient of a 2006 National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship. Her last book, *The Earth Moved: On the Remarkable Achievements of Earthworms*, was a featured selection of the Discovery Channel Book Club. She lives in northern California, where she writes for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Organic Gardening*. For events and more information, visit [www.amystewart.com](http://www.amystewart.com)

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978-1-56512-603-9 • \$13.95 paperback • Wherever books are sold

### THE GLOBAL MARKET

- Cut flowers are a \$40 billion industry worldwide
- Americans spend about \$6.2 billion on cut flowers and purchase roughly 4 billion stems per year. Put another way: Americans buy about 10 million cut flowers per day.
- Per-capita spending on cut flowers in the U.S. is about \$25. The Swiss have the highest per-capita consumption, at over \$100 per person.
- The famous Dutch flower auction at Aalsmeer handles 19 million flowers per day.
- About half the world's cut flower supply travels through Holland to be sold at one of its large auction houses.
- 78% of all cut flowers sold in the United States are imported, primarily from Latin America. This amounts to about 2.9 billion imported stems, most of them coming from Colombia and Ecuador.
- A typical wage on an Ecuadorian flower farm is \$150 per month. Wages represent less than four cents for every rose sold.

### GROWING THE PERFECT FLOWER

- The Plant Patent Act was passed in 1930. The goal was to encourage the breeding of new fruits and vegetables during a time when food was scarce, but the first three patents were for flowers. Of the first 300 patents registered, half were for roses.
- 'Star Gazer' is the most popular lily to ever hit the cut flower market. 13.8 million stems were sold through the Dutch auction system last year. But the man who hybridized it, Leslie Woodriff, never made a dime for his invention.
- Rose breeders may spend 7 years developing a new variety for market. An Australian team has been working for over ten years on developing a blue rose, using a pigment gene from petunias.
- There are only 59 large, commercial rose growers left in the United States, and they produce less than 10% of all roses sold in the country.
- Terra Nigra, one of the top three breeders of gerbera daisies in the world, offers 209 different varieties of the popular flower for sale.

What you don't know about flowers may surprise you.

Join bestselling author Amy Stewart on a behind-the-scenes tour of the gorgeous, bewitching, and bewildering business of flowers.



### INSIDE THE FLOWER SHOP

- Americans buy more roses, carnations, and chrysanthemums than they do all other flowers combined.
- Two-thirds of flower sales in the U.S. are made to women.
- Since 1997, almost 3500 flower shops have closed. Only 21% of flower purchases are now made at a florist, and roughly half are now made at supermarkets.
- The average floral purchase at a supermarket is \$9, and at a florist it is \$37.
- Two-thirds of flowers are purchased as gifts.
- The market for organic flowers is on the rise. Six percent of the flowers sold in the U.S. are certified as eco-friendly and socially responsible.

### MOTHER'S DAY

- Anna Jarvis founded Mother's Day in 1908 and encouraged people to send white carnations. Because it was so difficult to grow enough white carnations for the holiday, florists encouraged

sons and daughters to honor their mothers by sending her favorite flower, whatever it might be.

- 83 percent of us celebrate Mother's Day, and half choose flowers as a Mother's Day gift.
- Americans spend \$1.98 billion on flowers and plants for Mother's Day.
- 41 percent of Mother's Day flower purchases are mixed bouquets, and 33 percent are roses.
- 64 percent of Mother's Day purchases are made by women.
- Americans actually buy more flowers on Mother's Day than they do on Valentine's Day, because they tend to choose mixed bouquets and to buy flowers for more than just one person. In fact, only half of Mother's Day gifts go to mothers. The rest go to wives, friends, or other family members.

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