

Painted Tulip Flower Farm, Waterbury Center, Vermont

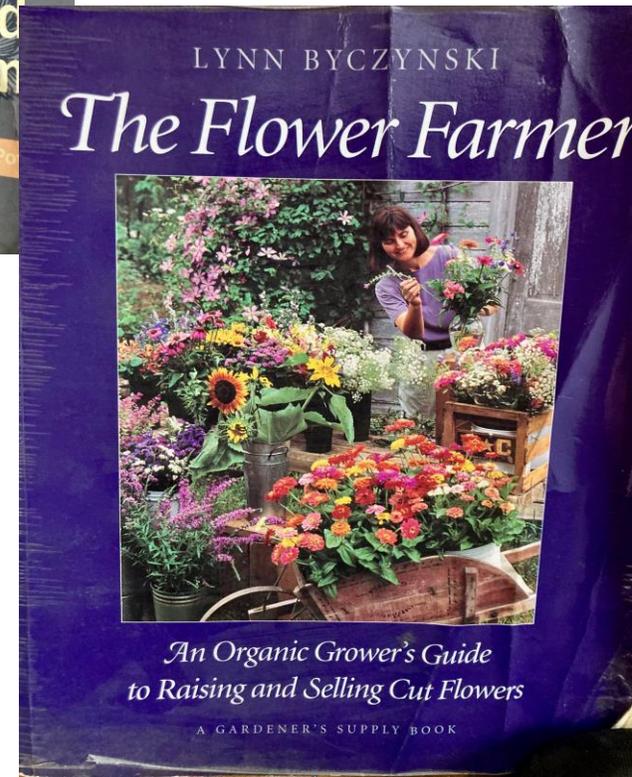
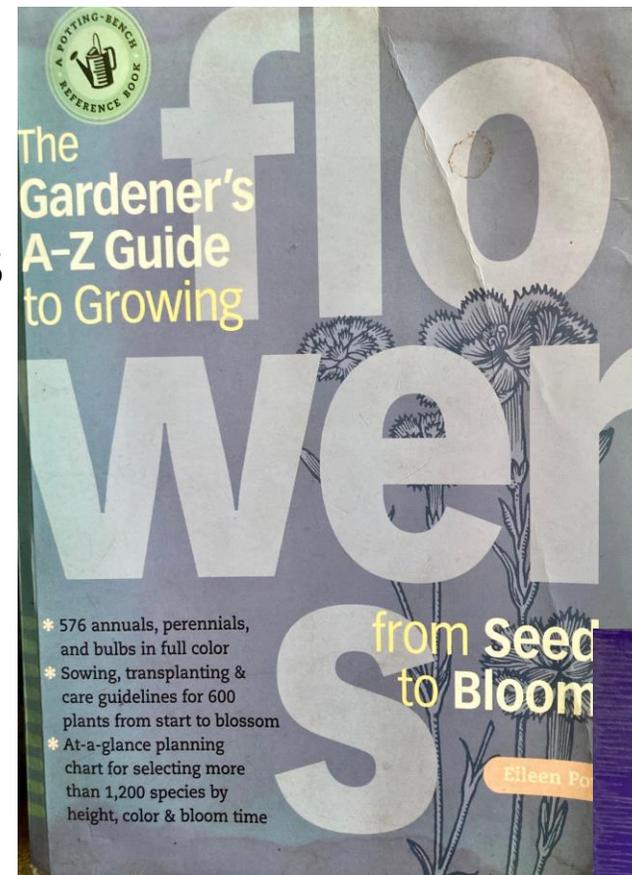
- Started in 2003 with 2.5 acre in “suburban” neighborhood.
- Had been a farm but not in years, only a shed was left from that time
- Gravely soil took years to build up with compost and cover crops.
- Minimal infrastructure.
- 17’x 24’ heated propagation house
- 17’ x 24’ cold frame, extended to 60’
- Caterpillar tunnel
- Storage in cool basement, no walk-in cooler till 2013



No horticulture or farming background

I learned by reading, and conferences

- The Flower Farmer- An Organic grower's guide to raising and sells cut flowers. By Lynn Byczynski.
- The Gardeners' A-Z Guide to Growing Flowers from Seed to Bloom.
- Studied seed catalogs. On-line Thomson and Morgan had seed sowing and spacing information.
- Later found Growing for Market newsletter
- 2009 - joined association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers - that was a game changer.



What we grow

Specialize in Ranunculus, Anemones and Dahlias

Tulips are a loss leader: high cost of bulbs and labor to plant. We grow/harvest them as an annual.

Common Annuals

- Zinnias
- Foxglove
- dianthus
- Snapdragons
- Sunflowers
- Ageratum

Perennials

- Hydrangea
- Peonies
- Baptisia
- Daffodils (bulbs) 5 different varieties, not long lasting but good for spring bouquets
- Pussy willow



Soil Management

- Low till
- A bar with 3 rippers on it makes three 6-9" furrows to get dahlias in quicker.
- Harrow once or twice per row to loosen soil and make our transplant furrows
- Add compost, small amounts of organic fertilizers



Cover crops and mulches

- Using winter-kill cover crops to create a spring mulch is difficult. We use all field space for crops.
- Seed cover crops after spring crop or when a succession of sunflowers is harvested.
- Used 6-month-old leaves as mulch, which brought in the false milkweed bug.
- Use and reuse black landscape fabric for walkways and to plant into.



Seeding and Transplanting

- Almost everything is grown in soil blocks starting mid January.
- Start growing under Blue/ Red Spectrum LED lights in the house. Then to the walk-in cooler which is temporarily turned into a grow room.
- Cool tolerant flowers - start planting into the high tunnel mid February. Several layers of row cover to keep from freezing. On nice days we take off the cover.
- We also use this technique to harden off starts.
- Transplanting gives a head start on weeds.



How we grow

- Tight spacing 40" beds with 5 to 6 rows
- Bigger plants like zinnias are on black landscape fabric 6 to 8" apart, 3 rows per bed
- Dahlias are spaced 1' apart



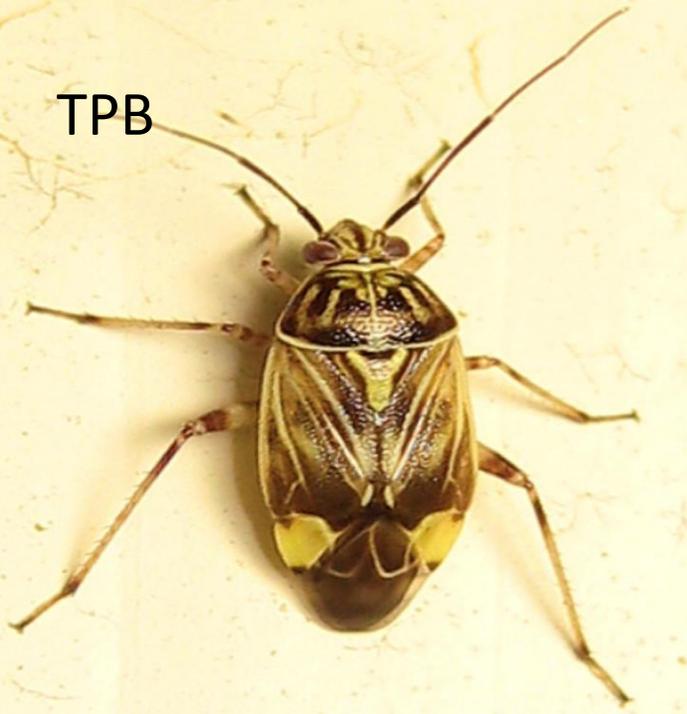
- Our flower beds go east to west with prevailing winds – reduces wind damage.
- Metal cattle panel bent to make an “N” shape about 4-6” above the ground keeps deer, groundhogs, and free-range chickens from destroying transplants.



For plants that get 3-4+ feet tall we use Hortnova netting

- Downside: It is plastic, it breaks down with time. We try to get as many years as possible.
- It tangles somewhat when unpacking from winter storage.
- Mice like to chew on it. We store it in plastic bins with lids and put moth balls in the bin.





TPB



WHB

Pests

- Tarnished plant bug and Wee Harlequin Beetle are the worst - causing skipping and deformed petals
- Earwigs
- Slugs
- Aphids
- Japanese beetles and grasshoppers - best solution free range chickens
- Leafhoppers
- Thrips - best solution IPM if in the high tunnel
- Insecticide options: neem oil, diatomaceous earth, stilet oil, BotaniGard Maxx
- Stilet oil is great for powdery mildew and helps manage aphids. It is broad spectrum insecticide. Commonly used on grapes, tree fruits, vegetables and ornamentals.

False Milkweed Bug

New to us last season, this demonic insect showed up.

I wasn't sure if it was good or bad but it's a sapsucker.

Insecticidal soap and removal of leaf litter are organic management methods



Harvesting

- Thursday for Saturday market, make bouquets on Friday.
- Some flowers we harvest at the best stage to last longest for our customers.
- Try to harvest in the morning, if didn't harvest around sunset.
- All flowers get stripped and are recut put in buckets into the cooler set between 37-40 degrees
- Some flowers don't like cold, those stay out
- We cut as fresh as possible.





Sales outlets first few years

- Burlington farmers' market
- City Market - wholesale bouquets
- Was not making a profit. Learning as I went.
- 2005 started doing weddings - much more profitable.
- More and higher-income weddings as years went on.
- 2006 started managing and selling at Waterbury farmers' market
- 2009 started growing dahlias and selling tubers online

Now:

- Burlington farmers' market
- Farm stand on my property
- Selling dahlia tubers on-line
- Dahlia growing workshops on the farm
- Selling to florists and a floral distributor
- Last year I had a booth at the Vermont Flower show. Sold pussy willow, cuttings to root, dahlia tubers and a few varieties of seeds collected from my farm

Thank you and hope you enjoyed this talk

Contact Nicole D'Agata
info@paintedtulipvt.com

