



# Scents of PURPOSE



Tammy Hall quit city life as an architect to forge a career growing flowers in Shropshire. Today, business is blooming – and she's nurturing other budding talents, too

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*"My garden has taught me how to grow flowers...  
It's given me space to make mistakes and I trust it"*

The scent in Tammy Hall's studio is warm and velvety, as though the late-summer roses and frothy bundles of phlox have absorbed the sun. The intense heather-honey of David Austin's 'Strawberry Hill' rose is underlaid with the rich hit of chocolate cosmos. The fragrance surrounds you like texture in the Victorian drawing room Tammy has turned into a workspace in her family's farmhouse. "It even takes me by surprise and I'm used to it," she admits. The room is nearly 12 metres long, yet the flowers, heaped on tables and filed on shelves according to their colour and shape, make it feel smaller and more intimate, a friendly setting for her floristry workshops.

It's eight years since Tammy gave up architecture to grow and sell traditional English garden-grown flowers. Outside the studio, her one-acre meadow displays rows of blooms for cutting, including the wildest, most graceful rose varieties she has been able to nurture. The farm is half in Shropshire, half in Herefordshire: from the shepherd's hut where customers collect her flowers and bouquets, you can see the line of Welsh hills that marks Offa's Dyke Path.

Tammy fell in love with this part of Britain 20 years ago when she emigrated from Australia to the UK after graduating. First, she lived in London, visiting Shropshire at the weekends to go paragliding. It was there she met her husband James, a fellow glider and a farmer with a 480-acre mixed farm he had taken over from his parents.

She moved here in 2006 and initially kept up her architecture work in Shrewsbury while helping James on the farm. Then, one day, she came across a magazine article about how Rachel

Siegfried founded Green & Gorgeous, a flower farm in Oxfordshire, and was inspired to grow her own flowers.

"I'd never grown anything, so I started with traditional veg-plot flowers – calendula, sweet peas, dahlias – planting them between the produce in James's vegetable garden and among the trees and chickens in the apple orchard," she says. "They're perfect for a beginner – sweet peas have a good germinating rate and dahlias are incredibly giving if you treat them well." She expanded into a ten-metre-square patch of her own, selling bouquets locally by word of mouth, and they went down so well that James ploughed up a quarter of the sheep-holding paddock for Tammy to cultivate.

### NATURE AND NURTURE

As a novice, Tammy tried to learn as much as she could, devouring gardening magazines and how-to manuals in every spare minute. Sarah Raven's *Grow Your Own Cut Flowers* became her bible ("Sarah is a godsend for people like me"). She also went on one of Rachel Siegfried's flower farming courses and garnered support through Flowers from the Farm, a network of growers set up by Gill Hodgson at her Yorkshire farm. But, while all this was very helpful, it was no substitute for trying things out herself. "My garden has taught me how to do it," she says. "It's given me space ▶

**THIS PAGE** In what was once the farm's sheep-holding paddock, Tammy's flower meadow includes the wildest, most graceful rose varieties

**OPPOSITE** In high summer, Tammy walks the flower rows, picking pompom-like dahlias, bright rudbeckias and calendulas





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It was four or five years before Tammy felt confident enough to swap architecture for growing full-time, thinking it would be an easier career to manage while looking after her two children ("I wasn't quite right about that but I've made it work!"). The 'slow flower' movement was taking off, encouraging people to buy local, sustainable blooms. Tammy sold bouquets at the fortnightly Ludlow farmers' market and was soon supplying buckets of flowers for parties. The following year, she registered with a wedding company and started workshops, which she now runs throughout her selling season of April to October.

Tammy's design background gives her an understanding of colour, composition and texture ("There is an ephemeral link with architecture"), but the ingredients depend on what the garden gives her - from snowdrops and aconites to winter berries, which she arranges in simple white ceramics or in her collection of old French green glass bottles. She is busy all year. As well as the flower meadow, there are two polytunnels and two greenhouses - "The heart of the garden, where my seedlings get going". When the courses are over in October, there will be next spring's bulbs to order and beds to prepare. Dahlia tubers that arrive in March need to be potted up for planting after the last

OPPOSITE AND ABOVE In a nod to her design background, Tammy's arrangements focus on colour, composition and

texture. She enjoys incorporating unexpected elements, foraged from neighbouring hedgerows

frosts at the end of May. "I rely on James as my weather guru," Tammy says, "because we might have snow as late as April."

### CULTIVATING NEW TALENTS

Arriving at a workshop, would-be florists find everything picked ready for use: foliage snipped and blooms collected on the worktop in clusters of different colours and textures, along with a notebook, secateurs, a handmade dish in which to arrange your flowers and a hand-dyed silk ribbon to tie them.

Over homemade apple cake and coffee or locally pressed apple juice, Tammy introduces her philosophy with a demonstration, putting orange-pink snapdragons alongside dusky violet campanula bells and slotting tiny stems of strawberry flowers among starbursts of rudbeckia and pompom dahlia heads. Students then walk the garden with her, exploring the field and the flower rows, learning how to incorporate the unexpected - a spray of summer-scented tomatoes, a stem of hazel or oak leaves foraged from the hedge - before heading back to the studio to try their own hand. Some workshops are one-to-one for people planning to become studio florists. Others are team-building sessions or designed for the merely curious, letting you pick your own flowers to take home.

Tammy's garden is enchanting, a world away from everything that shouts at you in everyday life. Watching the wild landscape and exuberant garden find their way into her arrangements and being able to take away cuttings is both grounding and liberating. It's proof of life in the best possible way.

**FIND OUT MORE** at [wildbunchflowers.co.uk](http://wildbunchflowers.co.uk). Workshops run from April to October, restrictions permitting.