

## Flowers are pretty, yes, but 'this is agriculture'

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Think of market flowers and Covent Garden might come to mind. But here in Toronto's city centre, local, seasonal and certified organic blooms are coming to market.

Last week, it was new farmer Shane Eby of Under Ground Organics attracting a crowd at Dufferin Grove farmers' market.

"People grow flowers, but often they don't want to cut them," says Eby, his table surrounded by mostly women awaiting bouquets that he makes to order.

Under Ground Organics is a two-hectare plot of rented land near West Flamborough, cultivated by Eby and his business partner, Julia Hitchcock, with Dan Riegler, a horticulturalist and third partner who focuses on plant selection and propagation.

"Julia and I don't have an agricultural background. We came to this through community development," says Eby, who worked for nearby community-shared agriculture farm Plan B and with Hitchcock on farms in British Columbia.

The farm, which is well into its third growing season, has 175 varieties of flowers, he says. "We have 18 different types of sunflower alone." There are also 35 types of herbs and 25 vegetable crops and the three partners recently planted 191 fruit trees.



RENÉ JOHNSTON/TORONTO STAR

Shane Eby, who grows organic flowers with the help of two partners, sells blooms at the Trinity Bellwoods and Dufferin Grove farmers' markets. (Aug. 14, 2008)

"People ask if we have a lovely garden, but this is agriculture," Eby says. "The plants we grow are carefully selected to be cut flowers."

The list of possibilities is long, but he rhymes off a few to expect: bachelor buttons, larkspur, poppies, lilies, dahlias and snapdragons. And this month, he says, is the high point. "Last week, we cut about 40 different types of flowers."

The organic certification is rarely considered for decorative plants. "It doesn't matter what the crop is, you should be involved in healthy practices," he says.

Besides, "you don't want to put your snout into a bouquet of chemicals."

*Under Ground Organics sells at two farmers' markets: Trinity Bellwoods on Tuesdays and Dufferin Grove on Thursdays.*

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