

episode 56 show notes and advice

Today Sarah interviews her friend and fellow cut flower grower Becky Crowley, who she first met when Becky was creating the amazing cutting garden at Chatsworth House.

In today's episode, Sarah and Becky talk about how arranging flowers helps them to plan what they want to grow. They share a wealth of information along with tips on how to achieve a jumpacked cutting garden almost all year round.

In this episode, discover:

- How Becky's background in fine art and floristry helped shape her design for the magical cutting garden at Chatsworth House.
- Becky's advice on how to grow cut flowers for each season of the year.
- Why Anemone coronaria and ranunculus are Becky's favourite flowers to start off with.
- Her favourite hardy annuals to sow in autumn for early spring flowers.
- Why winter flowering shrubs like witch hazel and viburnum are

Episode 56 advice sheet

As well as Sarah visiting Becky and the garden at Chatsworth, Becky also has taught at Perch Hill, first with florist Anna Potter, from Swallows and Damson (listen to episode 11 for Sarah's interview with Anna). Becky talked about growing cut flowers before they both demonstrated how they arrange them for the vase.

The cutting garden at Chatsworth

Becky studied fine art at university and came to gardening through a dual love of nature and seeking a creative outlet. Gardening ties the two together plus you get to be outdoors as much as possible.

Becky feels lucky to have been part of a historic and botanic garden bursary scheme at Chatsworth House. This led to her working as a florist for the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. She decorated their personal apartment as well as Chatsworth House. When she then got the cut flower growing job she had an idea of what was needed and what worked seasonally.

Becky's aim was to grow as much as possible and Sarah was a huge inspiration and source of information on how to establish a productive cutting garden with the longest possible

growing season. There was a lot of trial and error but she ended up growing a fabulous range of plants.

Becky used two of Chatsworth's Victorian glasshouses and started the growing season with Anemone coronaria and ranunculus asiaticus varieties – they come in so many different colours and forms and provide many flower stems to work with. At the other end of the season, she grew chrysanthemums - which gave her so many beautiful flowers late into the year, after the frosts wiped out almost everything else.

Chatsworth House is decorated all year round with cut flowers and potted plants and no two weeks are the same. It was a fine balance maintaining productivity, to supply flowers for the house, farm shop and events, while also keeping the garden looking beautiful for visitors.

Working for Floret Flowers in America

While Becky was at Chatsworth, she started sharing her work on Instagram, showing what was possible to grow in Derbyshire. A global movement of seasonal cut flower growers was beginning to emerge and connect on Instagram and Becky ended up working for Erin Benzakein from Floret Flowers, in Washington State USA. Several years ago, Erin went from a 2 acre cut flower farm to 24 acres. She wanted to create gardens and move into education, breeding and producing organic flower seeds. Erin came to the UK, where the climate is similar, for inspiration and research, meeting Becky at Chatsworth. At Floret, Becky helped Erin establish cutting and teaching gardens, planting miles of pollinator friendly hedges.

Future projects

Becky is working with garden designer Luciano Giubbilei on a commission to create a garden for medieval Raby Castle in Durham, collaborating on the cutting garden.

Back at Chatsworth, the family are moving to a smaller house and Becky is creating a new cutting garden for them.

Flowers for Instagram

Becky was one of the first to share stunning floral flat lay photos on Instagram. Initially she just wanted to document what was flowering that week in the garden to help her plan. As Chatsworth had a team of florists who did all the arranging, Becky found that creating these images provided her with a new creative outlet. She feels both arranging and photographing flowers help you learn more about them and the colours and combinations that work together, which in turn can inspire a planting scheme in a border.

Becky's top tips

What Becky most learnt from Sarah was that for a jampacked cutting patch all year round you need to grow varieties from all the different plant groups – bulbs, hardy annuals, half-hardy annuals, biennials, perennials and shrubs. (listen to Sarah's garden glossary episode to learn more about these different plant types. + articles x x.)

- Biennials – help stitch the season together when bulbs are finishing but annuals haven't yet flowered. Hesperis, lunaria and foxgloves planted in June along with some short-lived perennials, black cow parsley, aquilegia and lupins for fabulous flowers the following year.
- Hardy annuals – Sarah taught Becky all about sowing annuals like cerinthe, scabious, cornflowers, ammi and sweet peas in winter for the following year, saving time in spring.
- Winter flowering shrubs – more expensive to establish but so worthwhile – Viburnum x bodnantense 'Dawn', Ribes sanguineum 'White Icicle', Prunus x subhirtella 'Autumnalis', daphnes, corelopsis, witch hazels.

Growing tuberose

Becky taught Sarah that tuberose is best grown to flower in September/October, so planted crammed into a pot in June, in moist, free draining soil, with a ¼ of bulb showing, like an amaryllis. Bottom heat helps to get them going - Becky would sit them on plank of wood on top of a heating pipe at Chatsworth. Once flowering, move them outside in summer or into a cool greenhouse. Tuberose scent is incredible – two flowers will perfume a whole room.

How to stop rabbits eating all your seedlings

Becky had a huge battle with rabbits in her first year at Chatsworth. You just have to fence - Becky says mesh netting, all the way round your beds, dug down 30cm then 60cm above ground.

Becky's favourite cut flowers

As a seasonal grower her favourites change throughout the year.

- Right now it is witch hazel and early flowering prunus.
- Dahlia 'Chianti' is up there.
- Early season ranunculus and anemones.
- Icelandic poppies.

