

episode 61 show notes and advice

Episode Description

This week Arthur is joined by Milli Proust, a cut flower grower and florist whose first book *From Seed to Bloom* comes out in May. Featuring her creative, stunning photography with visual step-by-step guides, her book teaches you how to bring beautiful sustainable flowers into your garden and life. Milli shares favourite plants to grow and style each season and how she uses colour and form in her designs. Going through the book, they chat about Milli's life in flowers and how she started her abundant cutting patch from a small field, all grown from seed.

In this episode, discover...

- How posting beautiful flowers on Instagram led to Milli quitting her day job
- Her favourite toffee and stained glass coloured flowers to celebrate and bring into the home
- Learn why perennial narcissi are back on trend and the challenges of growing showstopper tulips commercially – from planting 6000 bulbs to having to sell them all in one day!
- Advice on how to achieve soil biodiversity to sow, grow and harvest flowers sustainably
- Shrubs to invest in and Milli's favourite roses 'Cinco de Mayo', 'Mocha' and 'Summer Song'

episode 61 advice sheet

Milli has been growing cut flowers commercially from a small field in Sussex for about five years now. She says she still feels new to the industry, having come from a creative background working as an actor and in the art world rather than via a traditional horticultural route.

Arthur comments on her creativity in both how she grows her flowers and her floral arrangements. The stunning photography by Eva Nameth features all throughout her book

and on her Instagram, giving a real sense of this – a gorgeous palette of toffee colours mixed with pink, buckets of peonies and tulips 'Brownie' and 'Belle Epoque', clouds of ammi and other umbellifers against a backdrop of hawthorn hedges and cherry blossom. There is an affinity with Perch Hill here and Sarah's books on cut flowers and her colour palettes are a huge inspiration for Milli.

Persian carpet cutting garden

Arthur feels the way Milli grows and the information she shares in her book is helpful for anyone wanting more flowers in their garden and life. Rather than tidy rows of flowers, Milli doesn't waste an inch of her space, underplanting and interplanting flowers all together, which creates what Arthur calls a gorgeous Persian carpet effect. This is partly because she has a fairly small space but also planting this way has benefits for soil health and diversity. There is a strong ethos of nature throughout the book, no floral foam is used, plant supports are made using sustainable hazel arches etc.

By word of mouth... and Instagram!

Milli started out growing veg and flowers while working full time in London. She started selling her veg to her local deli and soon was being asked to do the flowers for friends' weddings, then the friends of friends weddings and it grew from there. At the same time, she was building a following on Instagram where she was posting beautiful photographs of her arrangements and cutting patch.

Pandemic pivot point

When covid hit and the UK went into lockdown, all of Milli's upcoming weddings and events were cancelled. She had to figure out what to do with all the flowers she had growing. Her brilliant, stoic and solution focused grandmother told her that now more than ever people needed flowers and hope. Inspired by this, Milli quickly pivoted and set up a nationwide scheme for people to buy bunches of her flowers. She had a good customer base from [her Instagram](#) and her [e-newsletter](#) and she quickly sold every stem.

Writing her book has also been an important project. Working with perishable crop is a big learning curve. Milli wanted to share her journey and methods as well as exploring why flowers are important to her and the significance of her plot of land. There are so many ways to arrange flowers and combinations to try, Milli wanted to her book to make this accessible and give people lots of different ideas to try.

Showstopper tulips

This year Milli is only delivering bunches of flowers locally. As such she has downsized – instead of planting 6000 tulip bulbs she's gone down to 3000! Tulips are showstoppers and bring customers in. Milli loves them, especially the doubles and peony type tulips, but they can be tricky to manage and expensive to grow – a cold snap can set them back then one warm day and they all open at once with a very short selling window. Milli is glad perennial narcissi are currently on trend. She loves narcissi and finds them spectacular with so many interesting varieties to enjoy, featuring in her book as a library of narcissi.

Colour wheel

While Milli recognises and caters to the trend for flowers in a muddy, muted colour palette, she personally loves very bright primary, secondary and tertiary colours. Flowers in these bright colours look fantastic arranged in the vase. She also loves pastel tones, flowers tinted with white or flowers with black tones, in intense, dramatic colours.

As her customers often come to her via Instagram, they are usually open to Milli's creative ideas and how she interacts with colour but she grows a variety of colours to cover the tastes different clients she may have that year from the muted tones to the stained glass colours. She grows a blend of traditional cut flowers, half hardy annuals and cut and come again flowers with more modern flowers – like the café au lait roses and peonies.

Investing in shrubs and perennials

Milli has huge wish lists of flowers she wants to invest in. Two years ago she invested in an iris collection to fill the gap between ranunculus and peonies. Another year she invested in peonies – buying 52 new varieties in one go.

Roses form the most important part of Milli's cutting garden. In her view, her roses are so different from the flown-in flower roses at flower markets. They are expensive to grow but really worth it and create the most exceptional designs.

Some of Milli's favourite roses

'Summer Song'

['Cinco de Mayo'](#) – Milli loves the deep raspberry, cherry colour of this rose.

'Burgundy Ice' – A delicious suede plum rose

'Mocha' – This rose reminds Milli of gorgeous silk knickers from the 1920s.

Summer sweet peas

This summer Milli is keen to grow some interesting sativa sweet pea varieties – not annuals – in interesting colours and shapes – things that look like they are growing out of the house.

Hedgerows

Milli loves foraging from her hedgerows for arrangements but they are also important windbreaks – making her growing space a better environment for her flowers.