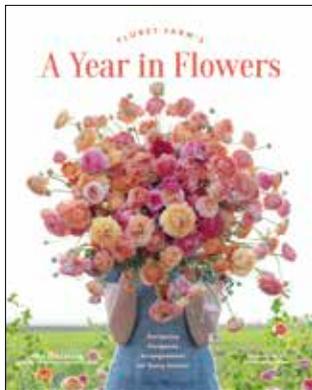


BOOK REVIEWS



**FLORET FARM'S
A YEAR IN FLOWERS**
by Erin Benzakein

Chronicle Books, £21.99
ISBN 978-1452172897

A book that persuades you that anyone who loves flowers can succeed in making beautiful, seasonal, sustainable arrangements – and enjoy it.

Reviewer Ambra Edwards is a garden writer.

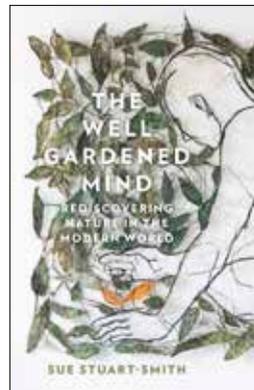
How I wish I'd had this book last summer, when I was faced with 130 arrangements to make for my daughter's wedding. The bride was adamant that she didn't want stiff, blingy commercial flowers produced in developing countries at hideous environmental cost, but graceful, informal arrangements of fresh garden flowers, fitting for an English country wedding. But how to achieve it? (Flower arranging must surely have been one of the arts you learned at finishing school, along with how to address a dinner invitation to the Archbishop of Canterbury.) If only we'd known about flower farmer Erin Benzakein...

Reading *A Year in Flowers* is like being taken by the hand by a very patient, very thorough, very smiley teacher. First she sets out the basics – the equipment you'll need: tools, tapes, flower supports and vases. Then she comes on to flowers. She too loathes the characterless blooms bred to travel half way round the world without water. 'Flowers are just like food', she writes, 'the best results always

come from using local, seasonal ingredients picked at their prime.' Imperfection and irregularity only add to their beauty.

She explains how to condition flowers, helpfully dividing material into 'wimpy', 'woody', 'sappy' and 'dirty'. And now comes the hard bit – putting arrangements together. Except it isn't hard at all, she insists: every arrangement requires just six fundamental ingredients, and once you've grasped this, you can do more or less anything – bouquets, centrepieces, posies, even floral crowns – as she illustrates with a range of seasonal examples.

The book is written in American, so English readers may be temporarily baffled by plant names such as winebark, honeysuckle or apple of Peru. Happily, most of these plants reappear, with their botanical names and larger pictures, in the helpful A-Z at the end of the book. Beautifully photographed, practical and succinct – give this book to every bride (and her mother).



**THE WELL GARDENED MIND:
REDISCOVERING NATURE IN
THE MODERN WORLD**
by Sue Stuart-Smith

Harper Collins, £20
ISBN 978-0008100711

Psychiatrist and psychotherapist, and wife of garden designer Tom, Sue Stuart-Smith provides a new perspective on the power of gardens to heal the mind.

Reviewer Marian Boswall is a landscape architect and garden writer.

This is a book so wise and comfortable that it merits a place alongside Christopher Lloyd's *The Well-Tempered Garden* by the side of every bed.

Dr Stuart-Smith read English at Cambridge before becoming an eminent psychiatrist and psychotherapist. Her writing has the simple grace of someone who really knows her subject and how best to explain it.

The book's main tenet is simple: that our gardens and nature are vital to our wellbeing. Having established the poor state of our current mental health and ecology, the book leads us gently through case studies, literary references and fascinating historic vignettes to clearly show what has been hiding in plain sight: that we are part of nature and that we need to cultivate our connection in order to thrive.

Stuart-Smith's work is as wide and as thorough as her scientific training and her in-depth research. She references places all over the world where horticulture is helping to heal, from secure

prisons in the USA to restorative gardens in the UK. Through touching conversations and sometimes harrowing stories, she introduces people who have been helped back from dark mental spiritual or physical situations by contact with nature and greenery. She also lightly brings in her own personal journey of healing and discovery as well as that of her grandfather after the First World War.

Her deep understanding of the human psyche makes this a perfect source text as well as an engrossing read. Topics range from our understanding of mortality, and relative time, to the scientific reasons why beauty calms and revitalises us. As she writes: 'If you are not a gardener it may seem strange to think that scabbling about in the soil can be a source of existential meaning.' But gardener or not she brings us closer to understanding how plants can help our individual and collective spirit.