

“Pick Your Own” Flower Business

Selling U-pick flowers is not an easy way to make a living, admits Cathy Lafrenz, but she says it has been a good sideline income producer.

The 20 by 20-ft. bed of flowers she started with in 2002 has grown to a full acre of annuals and perennials. She works 60-plus hours a week during the busiest part of the season. Customers travel to her rural Donahue, Iowa, home from mid-June until the first hard freeze, usually in October. The deal is \$15 for as many flowers as you can fit into a cut-off plastic gallon milk jug, which Lafrenz provides. Usually that’s between 25 and 50 stems or enough to make three nice bouquets. Some thrifty customers really get their money’s worth, but Lafrenz is known for adding even more flowers to many of her customers’ bouquets.

She wants “Miss Effie’s Country Flowers and Garden Stuff” to be more than just a business.

“It’s not summer until you come to Miss Effie’s,” she says people tell her. Besides providing a product, she provides an adventure and a welcoming atmosphere. There’s a bed to rest on in the garden and a “Cornzebo” to rent with tables and chairs, gas grill and a fire pit. A tree filled with hanging teacups given to her by customers symbolizes the relationships she develops.

Work begins in early spring when she plants 8,000 annual plugs.

“The flowers have to have at least two reblooms and be taller than normal varieties,” Lafrenz says. She has old-fashioned and new varieties including zinnias, snapdragons, cosmos and sunflowers, just to name a few. There are also perennials – daisies, Asiatic lilies, Echinacea, *Veronicastrum*, and more.

Flowers are grown without chemicals and planted close together in rows 30 in. apart so they will grow tall. They are supported by cattle panels that the Lafrenzes cut and bend. She collects up to 3,200 gallons of rainwater and uses a pump and hoses to irrigate when there isn’t enough rain. She pulls weeds and mulches (63 yards worth) for weed control.

“About 60 percent of my time is working with customers. I teach them how to cut the flowers and what to look for,” Lafrenz says.

Location is important (she’s near the Quad Cities), but so is marketing. “Facebook works just as well as anything,” Lafrenz says. She has over 1,000 fans, and she lets people know about events, what’s in season, and other products that are available from

people who sell at her on-farm store. It’s also helped her develop a wedding market.

“I’m working with a bride for a September wedding,” she explains. “We’re looking at \$240 to \$250 for everything.”

Besides saving lots of money, picking flowers adds to the wedding experience. One couple brought their bridal party, family and friends to the farm at 8 a.m. Each person had a list of what to cut, and by 11 a.m. the group left with all the flowers they needed. They had time for a brunch and plenty of laughs while getting the job done.

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The 20-ft. bed of flowers Lafrenz started with in 2002 has grown to a full acre.

New Way To Drill Your Own Well

If you’ve checked the price of drilling a new well lately, you know you’re looking at an expense of thousands of dollars. That’s what prompted a pair of Texas inventors to come up with a new do-it-yourself method.

The heart of the system is an air-powered sander/polisher that can be picked up for about \$35. The Bursons removed the handle to fit the power tool inside a piece of pvc pipe. Then they drilled a hole in the back of the sander’s housing so air could exit.

With the right selection of “bits” and a compressor that’ll put out 16 cfm at 90 psi, they soon had a well drilling rig. Best of all, Burson says, it practically digs the well by itself. Here’s how it works:

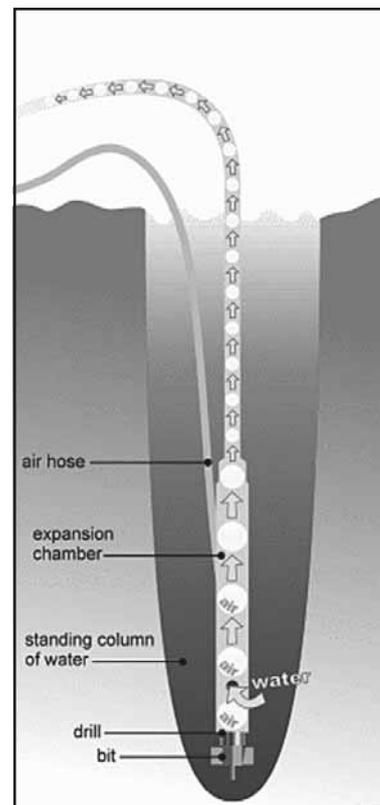
A small hole is dug and water is added. Then the pipe with the sander and bit inside is inserted into the hole. As air passes up the pipe, it creates a vacuum that pulls in the water and soil to the surface through a hose. After filtering out the solids, the water is returned to the hole.

“The most revolutionary idea in the system was using the exhaust air coming out the hole in the sander’s housing to remove water and dirt from the hole,” says Burson. He reports using the system to dig wells as deep as 210 feet.

Kits ship with bits to drill a hole large enough for a 4-in. thin wall, pvc casing.

The time needed to drill a well depends on the type of soil and the depth needed to find water. In sandy areas of Florida, drilling a well can take as little as a day, while clay and rock can stretch drilling out to a week or more.

Well-Tek sells kits for \$539.95. Plans to



build your own kit and an instructional DVD are available for \$29.95 on the company website, which also features free videos of the system at work

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Well-Tek, 10758 Highway 155 S., Big Sandy, Texas 75755 (ph 903 576-6800; www.howtodrillawell.com).

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