



Jack DeVroomen is known as the tulip king of South Carolina, where he's a catalog-order wholesaler. He and his wife love tulips so much they plant more than 30,000 bulbs in their own backyard each year.

"Tulip King" Brought Bulb Business From Holland To South Carolina

Jack DeVroomen is known as the tulip king of South Carolina, a moniker based on his family's long history in flowering bulbs. He is the fifth generation of DeVroomens in the flower-bulb business.

One of DeVroomen's favorite bulb varieties is "Jack's Giant" elephant ear, a spectacular display plant from Costa Rica. It was named after DeVroomen by Tony Avent of Plant Delights, who initially propagated the plant in the U.S. Today Jack's Giant produces leaves up to 2 by 4 ft. in size.

DeVroomen was born in Lisse, Holland, the flower-bulb capital of the world. He immigrated to the U.S. in 1978. In 1999 he, along with several Dutch partners, purchased the Marlboro Bulb Company in Greenwood, South Carolina. "Today, about the only bulb we don't sell is a light bulb," DeVroomen says.

About 50 percent of Marlboro's bulbs are imported from Holland and the rest are sourced from Costa Rica, Florida and elsewhere. Marlboro is strictly a catalog-order wholesaler and supplies bulbs to garden centers, landscapers, greenhouses, parks, arboretums, garden clubs and home gardeners. The company sells both fall and spring bulbs, including tulips, daffodils, caladium and elephant ears. The annual volume of bulbs sold is more than 100,000 tulips, 120,000 daffodils, 80,000 plus caladiums, and 50,000 plus elephant ears.

Most bulbs arrive at the company in bulk crates and are repackaged for sale in point-of-purchase packages for garden centers and in small quantities for home gardeners.

Even bulbs that don't sell by mid-winter find a home, says DeVroomen. "My wife and I plant our one-acre home site to 30,000



One of DeVroomen's favorite plants is "Jack's Giant", an elephant ear that can grow up to 2 ft. wide and 4 ft. long.

bulbs. We're able to do that because we add soil on top of bulbs placed in older beds each year. It makes for quite a spectacular display of color."

DeVroomen is proud to say that Keukenhof Gardens in Holland, which boasts more than 7 million bulbs and 800 varieties of tulips on 79 acres, was founded in part by DeVroomen's grandfather. Keukenhof is described as "the world's most beautiful spring garden," attracting more than 1 million visitors over 8 weeks each spring.

DeVroomen says two of the keys to operating a successful mail-order bulb company are having good suppliers and good customer service. "We've been building relationships with our suppliers for 40 years and it definitely pays off in high-quality bulbs and timely deliveries." DeVroomen and his wife, Patricia, also do talks and presentations about bulb gardening.

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U-Pick Flower Business Offers More Than Money

Omena Cut Flowers pays off for owner Carolyn Faught with money as well as personal enjoyment and customer satisfaction. Over the past 20 years she has built a healthy sideline selling flowers from her acreage in northern Michigan. Her U-pick business operates from dawn till dusk seven days a week from May through October.

"For me the garden is a spiritual thing," says Faught. "After 9/11 people came out to the flower fields to recover; others write in my guest book about picking flowers to take to a gravesite or for the mother of a newborn baby. Some write that it reduces their blood pressure just to come and pick."

Faught credits her mother for introducing her to flower gardening as well as an article she read years ago about a U-pick flower farm in Oregon for getting her started. The first year she and a friend planted six 4-ft. wide flower beds, adding a few more the next year. Although her friend drifted away from the business, Faught persevered and the beds and the business grew.

"This year I'll have 26 beds, all 4 ft. wide and some up to 50 ft. long," says Faught. "I have 3/4 of an acre under cultivation with beds and grass paths in between."

The bed width makes it easy to reach in from either side to weed and tend to the perennials. She puts landscape fabric on beds of annuals, burning holes in it to place transplants. At the end of the season she pulls it up, tills, plants a cover crop and layers the beds with compost for the next season.

"The landscape fabric has been a blessing for reducing weed pressure and labor," says Faught.

She admits her grass paths have a downside. Keeping the grass from spreading into the flower beds is difficult, and the grass takes up space that could be planted. However, she says they are a blessing in their own right.

"They are lovely to look at for me and for my customers," says Faught. "The aesthetics are why people come here. It's what makes our U-pick a place to come."

A continuous palate of flowers coming into blossom is another reason customers come. Faught has more than 50 perennials and annuals. Every year she tears out a bed or two, dividing and replanting perennials. She also sells potted perennials in the spring that have been dug from her beds in the fall.

Faught warns against expanding faster than you can handle, recalling one year she dug up too large an area.

"Don't get overwhelmed," she adds.



Carolyn Faught has built a successful U-pick business selling flowers from her small acreage in northern Michigan.

"Master one thing and then go on to the next."

She also advises finding a niche that works for you and your lifestyle. Faught works four days a week as communications director for a local nonprofit. Operating the U-pick fits her available hours well. Her customers come when they like, go to the well-stocked shed to pick up containers, clippers, and a form to track the type and number for flowers picked. When they finish, they total up their harvest and leave money in the lockbox. They can also pick from bouquets and check chalkboards on the shed doors for specials.

"I've tried a lot of things in the past, including farmers markets, weekly subscription deliveries and selling to florists," says Faught. "I now focus on the U-pick, though I still offer some subscriptions. You can't do everything, so learn the niche that is most profitable and enjoyable for you."

The enjoyment part is key to Faught. Not only does she enjoy working around the flowers, but also she reports loving to weed. She admits to also being fortunate that her husband works out of their home. His idea of a work break is to mow the grass paths and till the beds when needed.

Faught puts social media to work for the business. The Omena Cut Flowers Facebook page has nearly 4,000 likes.

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Custom Press Squeezes Oil, Fluids Out Of Herbs

Brian Huckins can help you turn herbs into medicinal tinctures with his customized presses. The Massachusetts-based blacksmith makes presses that squeeze fluid from herbs infused with alcohol.

He has made around half a dozen presses, customized to the buyer's needs. Huckins recalls one customer with a disability.

"I put a larger wheel on the press to make it easier for her to press out the herbs," he says. "It gave her a greater mechanical advantage so she didn't have to turn so hard."

Although his first press was designed inside its own container, Huckins has settled on a design that collects the squeezed-out fluid in a tray. Although he

could use stainless steel for both, he usually uses stainless steel for the cylinder and an epoxy-coated steel for the press heel. The frame is powder-coated steel.

"It is easier to find a stainless steel tray than a pot, especially one without a contoured bottom," he says. "To work with the press, they need a perfectly flat base."

Huckins prices his presses at \$549 and up, plus shipping. Actual price depends on size and features.

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Brian Huckins custom-builds presses that squeeze fluid from herbs infused with alcohol.

