

Love me, but love the Lord's Planet also!

*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,
the world and all who live in it; (Psalm 24:1, NIV)*

With **St Valentine's Day** approaching, it is worth remembering that most imported cut flowers sold in **Europe** come from equatorial **East Africa**. However, the single largest producer in the world is **Colombia**, which exported an estimated 660 million stems in 2020. Other top producers are **Ecuador, Sri Lanka, China** and **Kenya**, the latter supplying one-third of all roses sold in the EU.

The hidden costs of most imported cut flowers include:

1. Water usage:

The cut flower industry consumes large volumes of water for irrigation. For example, drought-stricken **Lake Naivasha** in **Kenya**, has, reportedly, seen half of its water drawn off for use in flower greenhouses. One hectare of a flower farm can consume more than 900 cubic meters of water per month.



2. Aeroplane Fuel Consumption:

Wilted flowers don't sell, so speed on the route to market is vital. Hence, imported cut flowers come with a massive carbon foot-print. For example, in 2018, Valentine's Day flowers grown in Colombia and flown to US airports produced some 360,000 metric tons of CO₂,

according to the **International Council on Clean Transportation**. That's roughly equivalent to 78,000 cars driven for one year.



3. Health Impact for Workers:

Given that cut-flower growing often uses strong chemicals, workers can be exposed to toxins in fertilizers and insecticides, as well as preservatives used to extend the life of blooms.

In addition to toxin exposure, workdays can be 16 hours. This makes it especially hard for women to get maternity leave and find childcare. In Kenya, women make up 60-70 percent of the floriculture workforce.



If I want to buy cut flowers, what should I look out for?

It is, of course, a great pleasure, both to give and receive flowers, and at times, we have little choice in what we buy. Also, it can be the case that cut flowers create opportunities for trade and jobs, especially in impoverished regions that have ideal flower-growing

climates. However, if the flowers carry a **Fair Trade** label, or other ethical certification, then the workers should get a fair deal at least.



Sorcha Hamilton, in *The Irish Times*, wrote:

‘There are some fair trade, organic flower producers, such as **Florverde**, that have minimised water usage via drip irrigation and rainwater collection and use alternative, integrated pest control. The **Flower Farmers of Ireland** association focuses on seasonally-grown and sustainably-produced flowers. On their website, www.flowerfarmersofireland.ie, you’ll find a list of producers who can be contacted directly. And there are plenty of lovely suggestions on their website for arrangements outside of the summer-spring flower seasons, such as ornamental grasses for autumn, or evergreen foliage, dried flowers, and bare birch or hazel branches for winter.’

‘Don’t go destroying the planet, to show your love for me?’

Let's face it guys, buying a bunch of flowers can cost a bit, but it's a relatively simple transaction – until your other half, or your own conscience, tells you that the real cost of those flowers is not merely on the price tag.

My dear wife told me, pretty early on in our relationship, that if I really loved her, I would NOT be giving her imported, out of season, cut flowers, ESPECIALLY on **St Valentine's Day!** Food for thought?

In conclusion:

As consumers, not to mention, *old romantics*, it's time to start thinking about flowers in the same way as fruit and vegetables – grown locally or in your own garden, and enjoyed seasonally, when they're at their best.



Meanwhile, here are some local, seasonal, flower growers:

1. www.clonakennyflowerfarm.com, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary.
2. www.soahflowers.com, Co. Kilkenny (North)
3. www.theflowerfield.net, Rosnastraw, Tinahely, Co. Wicklow.

4. Bell Meadow, Tearman House, Knocknagan, Tullow, Co. Carlow. 086-0769720, bellmeadowireland@gmail.com
5. Mount Alexander Flowers, Gorey, Co. Wexford. 087-9340083, mountalexanderflowers@gmail.com
6. Tara Hill Flowers, Gorey, Co. Wexford. 086-8353474, tarahillflowers@gmail.com
7. Trisha Kearns, Pullinstown Little, Marshalstown, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford. 087-2121868, trishakearns01@gmail.com
8. Gardamus Little Smallholding, Mayglass, Bridgetown, Co. Wexford. 089-4990025, osborne_kay@hotmail.com.
9. Tara Challoner, Harperstown, Ballymitty, Co. Wexford. 083-3577734, tarizany@yahoo.com
10. Wallflower, Ballycullane, New Ross, Co. Wexford. 086-3224682, info@wallflower.ie
11. Bizzy Lizzie's Flowers, Dunmore East, Co. Waterford. 085-7835528, bizzylizzies2018@gmail.com

Sources:

- Hamilton, Sorcha: *"Flowers: Not so pretty when you consider their environmental impact"*, The Irish Times, 26th August 2019

- Davidson, Ros: *“The environmental impact of cut flowers? Not so rosy”*, 5th May 2021. Accessed 4th January 2022. <http://www.ideas.ted.com/the-environmental-impact-of-cut-flowers>.
- The Flower Farmers of Ireland. Accessed 4th January 2022. <http://www.flowerfarmersofireland.ie>.