



Flowers for Life

California flower grower Natasha Graham discovered first hand the healing power of flowers and now uses them to also transform the lives of others.

BY TERESA J. SPEIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NIESHA BLANCAS, FETCHING SOCIAL

NATASHA GRAHAM started Yosemite Flower Farm in Mariposa, California, in 2020. The small-scale flower farm uses no-till, organic practices to grow a wide selection of cut flowers Natasha sells weekly at nearby farmers' markets. Yosemite Flower Farm also maintains a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) floral subscription program and offers local flower deliveries.



THE JOURNEY TO FLOWERS

By the time she embraced flower farming, Natasha Graham had spent more than two decades living in San Francisco, working in both the culinary world and in technology sales. Professional success enabled Natasha and her husband to purchase a home in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, about 170 miles east of San Francisco in the remote community of Mariposa, 40 miles from Yosemite National Park. The property is reached by following an unpaved, two-mile road leading to a five-acre vineyard surrounding a berm-style house built into the mountain, its design ensuring cool interiors during average summer temperatures of 80 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

The couple originally acquired the property in 2018, and although Natasha enjoyed weekend visits while they completed renovation work, she had no plans to permanently relocate.

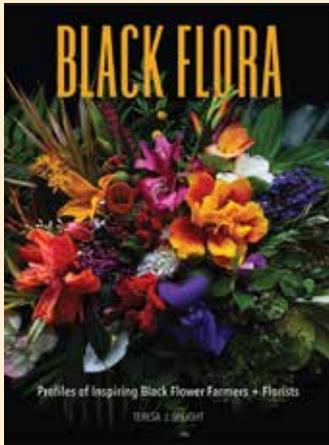
"This was just supposed to be an investment property. My husband came out here for four months to work on the house and then he didn't want to come back to San Francisco," she laughs. "I'm completely a city girl—I was raised in Los Angeles—and I told him, 'I'm not moving there!'"

Natasha had tended a garden of food and flowers in her San Francisco backyard, and she described herself as a "farmers' market groupie" during the years she worked in the Bay Area, waiting

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tables, cooking, and managing various restaurants. Her favorite culinary job was as nutritional chef for the YMCA. "I'd go to food banks and do live demonstrations to show people how to use the vegetables, fruit, and other produce in their meals, and then write up my recipes to share. Besides farming, it was probably the best job I've ever had because I was teaching people."

The road to flower farming followed the loss of her mother in 2016, which, understandably, left Natasha seeking a change of pace as well as time to heal. "I noticed every time I would drive away from San Francisco and head here to the Sierra foothills I



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For more information about **Yosemite Flower Farm**, visit yosemiteflowerfarm.com.



felt no stress or anxiety until I returned to the city. A lot of that stress came from living in San Francisco's big city intensity." After commuting back and forth for an entire year, Natasha's attitude changed and, in December 2019, she decided to call Mariposa her full-time home.

Bolstered by her husband's encouragement, Natasha realized her depression over the loss of her mother dissolved when she spent time in the garden. "I was getting up really early to start my day at four or five in the morning. And I was out there until way past dark," she recalls. "It made me so happy just to see the growth of my plants and the seasons change in the garden."

GROWING A BUSINESS

The idea of transforming the Mariposa garden into a flower farm originally seemed like a way to market their property as a pretty vacation rental. "The rental idea still hasn't happened,"

Natasha explains. "But things kind of steamrolled as I discovered how therapeutic gardening was." In January 2020, she enrolled in an online flower farming class and soon established Yosemite Flower Farm to grow zinnias, cosmos, sunflowers, roses, dahlias, and other vibrant, heat-loving flowers. Natasha had early success selling her blooms at the farmers' markets, but admittedly, she felt isolated from other flower farmers.

Through Instagram, she discovered Aishah Lurry of Patagonia Flower Farm in Arizona, and a floral sisterhood blossomed. "Daily contact with Aishah was like having a great friend by my side

"Flowers gave me a reason to get up in the morning and live."

in the garden as I built my business," Natasha says. "She helped me strategize ideas for creative marketing, for locating places to sell, and was a comforting voice as I navigated this new journey. I had the ambition and the drive, but I needed to connect with someone who was pursuing a similar path."

Natasha knows there have been many historical and systemic obstacles for African Americans to enjoy the fullness and beauty of nature in this country. "To be an African American flower farmer, to grow and sell what brings joy to others, is quite meaningful to me. I want to show what success looks like so more African Americans can connect with nature, own land, and establish farms." 

Author, gardener, and speaker Teresa J. Speight lives in Maryland. Visit her website at <https://cottageinthecourt.com>.