



FARMER FLORISTS *and* WEDDING CONSULTATIONS

Farmer florists and cut-flower growers who also create and retail floral designs must understand the process and importance of conducting an organized wedding floral design consultation. This initial meeting is the foundation of the entire process of selling, designing, delivering, and installing wedding flowers because it opens a pathway for communication and helps keep the activity orderly and profitable.

Many flower farmers operate farm-based floral design businesses. This may involve those who deliver a few arrangements per year to those who are sought after for events and weddings. The service of designing and selling wedding flowers is a natural outcome of growing flowers. This is how the florist business came into being—growers catering to client requests for floral decorations used in homes and for events. People become involved with flowers because they have an affinity for creative design and find it rewarding.



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Prioritize the marketing and sale of flowers and ornamental foliage from your flower farm rather than buying from external sources. You have the potential to make greater profit on flowers and greenery you grow, rather than buying them from wholesale florists and brokers. As your wedding floral design business gains maturity, you will learn to tailor your crops toward what you can use in weddings.

Floral design service can be burdensome to some, yet pleasing to others. Wedding floral sales can be enjoyable and profitable if the florist is able to guide the client through a professional consultation that results in decisions that help all stakeholders, including the wedding couple, farmer florist, celebrants, and wedding guests. A wedding floral sales consultation is unique and involves dialogue between the florist and consumer. Ideally, clients will receive value-filled, beautiful designs, and the farmer florist will create profitable designs that showcase the farm's best flowers.

The creation of bridal floral designs can be profitable but also challenging. Wedding flower orders are detailed, and even the simplest

of weddings have numerous elements to organize, such as delivery time, coordination with photographers, flowers to wear, and specific requests that are unique to the couple. Achieving professional-looking floral designs requires skill and practice, the same as growing the flowers used in the designs. There are many aspects of designing and selling wedding flowers, including business, art, design, science, and some psychology, too. Farm-grown flowers, cut foliage, and appropriate accessories combine to create an effective floral design—an arrangement with a decorative purpose.

Sometimes, it is necessary to view floral design as a legitimate branch of the existing business. Some farmers explore wedding floral design by making up bouquets and arrangements for relatives and friends. Often, they charge very little or nothing for their flowers or the finished product. The mindset that farmer floristry is a hobby must change, and the owner must realize that it is a business that must stay on the income side of profit and loss.

A wedding floral consultation is just that, a consultation. It is not merely taking an order.

Order-taking is a one-way conversation, a dictation of what the customers feel they want with little response from the vendor. Clients may be satisfied with the results, but they may be let down by the lack of enthusiasm for their important day. They may feel that if they had had a consultation with an experienced, creative professional instead of someone who merely wrote an order, their wedding flowers would have been different. An effective consultation involves both listening and speaking. A good florist offers helpful advice, based on knowledge and experience, to bring value to the sale. It is important to understand and support the meaning and feeling a couple and their families want to portray. When clients buy wedding flowers, they are not buying static objects. They are making purchases that frame the significance of the event and share their feelings and emotions with guests. Well-designed wedding flowers are important and powerful.

Making the Farm Experience Part of the Wedding Floral Design Experience

A wedding does not have to be on a farm to have a farm experience. Most flower farms do not have the dedicated space for special events. There are tools and implements in sight that are not necessarily attractive props. Some farms do, however, offer space for weddings and receptions.

What makes buying from the flower farmer unique is the variety of floral materials used, along with their field-to-vase freshness. Geography and climate define what is grown locally and used in wedding floral design. Similarly, the individual style of the farmer florist shows through in the work.

The sales process itself becomes part of the wedding experience because farmer florists and their products, services, and perspectives are unique. There is value in wedding flowers that are produced locally. Locally produced flowers are desirable, and clients will seek them out in the marketplace.



How to Become Successful in *Wedding Floral Design*

The more you know, the more confident you will feel.

The more confident you feel, the more clients will trust you.

The more trust you build, the more you will be able to design *your* way.

The more you design your way, the more the public will recognize your unique designs in the marketplace.

The more your designs are recognized, the more people will seek your style.

The more people seek your style, the more successful your business will become.

Marketing Wedding Flowers

Most flower farmers want to increase their marketing efforts but have difficulty setting aside the time. There are many ways to counter this problem, and three are detailed below.

Do Good Work

The best way to increase your wedding work is to do good wedding work. It all starts with the first wedding order. Potential clients are in attendance at each wedding. They may be bridesmaids, attendees, relatives, or friends. If people notice the flowers, they will talk about them. The trick is to make sure the talk is positive.

Wedding floral design is simple, as long as everything is installed ahead of time (before pictures are taken, before guests arrive and are seated) and everything meets or exceeds expectations. This does not mean adding more flowers to make an arrangement fuller or working on a wedding order for 48 straight hours. Mistakes such as these are damaging to the business's success. Doing consistently good work does not quickly increase the number of weddings a farm will book, but it does build a good foundation for business.

The Right Website

Brides and grooms constantly search the Internet looking for ideas, vendors, prices, and all of the details necessary to plan a wedding.

They appreciate images of floral designs for altars, bouquets, and centerpieces so they can better understand the quality and scope of a farmer florist's past work. Many florists agree that a wedding floral website is a place to dream and be inspired.

The floral design division of the farm should have at least its own section on the larger farm website. Think about the similarities and differences of the flower farm—the production side and the floral design side. Sometimes the two have many similarities. For example, some farms encourage visitors to pick their own flowers, and they also help customers decide on what kinds of flowers look best in a centerpiece, how to combine colors, or how to create an arrangement. In this case, production and design are closely tied together. It may work best to blend product and service more closely.

Of course, each of these elements has real costs to the farmer. For example, while larkspur needs to be harvested, the farmer is teaching a bride how to make her bouquet. If the farmer is not being paid for design tutoring, there are no funds to pay someone to harvest the larkspur. This can cause some farmers to create a greater distinction between production and design. In some situations, it may be best for clients not to be encouraged to visit the farm, study how to arrange flowers, or learn how their flowers are arranged. For another example, if your farm has been known for low prices and farmers' markets, but you want greater margins on wedding flowers, you can link the two entities, but make sure they are clearly separate.

In any case, consider a response item on the website that collects data from potential clients. If a client requests a consultation, ask

for their name; contact information; requested consultation date and time; and wedding and reception date, times, and locations. It is also a good idea to provide extra space for additional questions, requests, or details they may have. Ask them to create a list of everyone who would receive flowers. It is a good idea to request that the client bring one other person (and no more than two other people) to the consultation. Too many people can create confusion and a lengthy consultation.

It is also a good idea to post images of your flowers and floral designs to Instagram, Pinterest, and Facebook. These will help to connect the floral business to wedding couples and their parents.

Participate in Bridal Shows until You Do Not Need Them

Participation in bridal shows/fairs is a good idea, and farmer florists are encouraged to create an exceptional display. Never sign up for a fair without viewing it as a spectator first. It is best to have an idea of how other floral vendors display their products. Bridal shows often allow vendors to follow up with attendees through contact information lists. If only one wedding booking results from participation, it still builds the wedding floral foundation.

Create a display that will start a conversation, and present work that reflects the best products from your flower farm. Avoid trying to create and display arrangements that reflect another designer's style or an aesthetic that cannot be easily replicated. A Deep South flower farm may not grow peonies, so it follows that they would not promote that flower.

Provide attendees with a handout that lists considerations about wedding flowers. Promote your flowers by listing accolades from previous customers, certifications, and more. Tell them why your products and services are superior.

Do not be someone else. Be the best *YOU* that *you* can be!

Consultations

In order to write effective, mutually beneficial contracts, farmer florists should have an understanding of all fundamental wedding floral decorations. Trends come and go, from types of containers to ways couples want to express themselves through floral decorations. Though trends change, there are still traditions in how wedding flowers are displayed, who carries them, and who wears them. It is always best to suggest designs rather than wait for a customer to request everything. The design consultation allows for the client to accept or reject possible designs. If certain designs are never suggested, such as wreaths or swags for the chapel doors, they may never be sold even though the client would like them.

Charging for the Consultation?

A consideration that farmer florists should make regarding wedding flower sales is whether or not to charge for the wedding consultation. It is not unusual to find some florists who ask for a consultation fee, a payment that covers the time when clients speak to the florist about the wedding flowers and receive an estimate. Some farms are charging do-it-yourself clients a deposit prior to arrival, which is a good idea to discourage “no-shows.”

Upfront communication about consultation fees helps ensure a client is serious about the sale and will be on time for the appointment. The fee may, or may not, be applied to the retail cost. It is something that designers should keep in mind if they feel that clients are shopping for information, not flowers. Conversely, such a fee may turn a potential client off from products and services. Some florists may offer a brief, initial meeting to discuss general ideas and price ranges for designs or entire weddings. If the client decides to book with the florist, a consultation fee can be assessed for that meeting, which may or may not be applied to the retail cost of the wedding flowers.

Most florists do not charge, but these concepts are certainly worthy of thought.

Keep in mind that a consultation is not just the farmer florist’s opinion of what works well and what does not. You are applying your horticultural knowledge—considering cut flower and foliage color ranges, seasonality, prices, purchasing flowers not grown on the farm, post-harvest life, and many other factors. In order to arrive at a retail price, you must then figure stem counts, processing and design labor, accessories, and design mechanics. Delivery, set-up, and dismantling of floral designs must be considered, as well as adding floral trims to cakes and any reception décor.

You must devote much time to explaining wedding flower costs to your clients. This time should be compensated monetarily. Remember, wedding floral design is a business, not a hobby.

Suggested Outline for Wedding Floral Consultation

There are five major sections to a wedding flower consultation. If you use these, you are well on your way to organizing an effective sales consultation.

- I. Vital information
- II. Bridal party flowers
- III. Ceremony flowers
- IV. Reception flowers
- V. Terms of sale

I. Vital Information

Record the vital information first. This involves contact information for the wedding couple and the person who is responsible for paying the bill. List all names and contact information—cell and work numbers, mailing addresses, email addresses. Be thorough and complete.

Record the wedding date and time, reception time, and location of both.

What time does photography start?

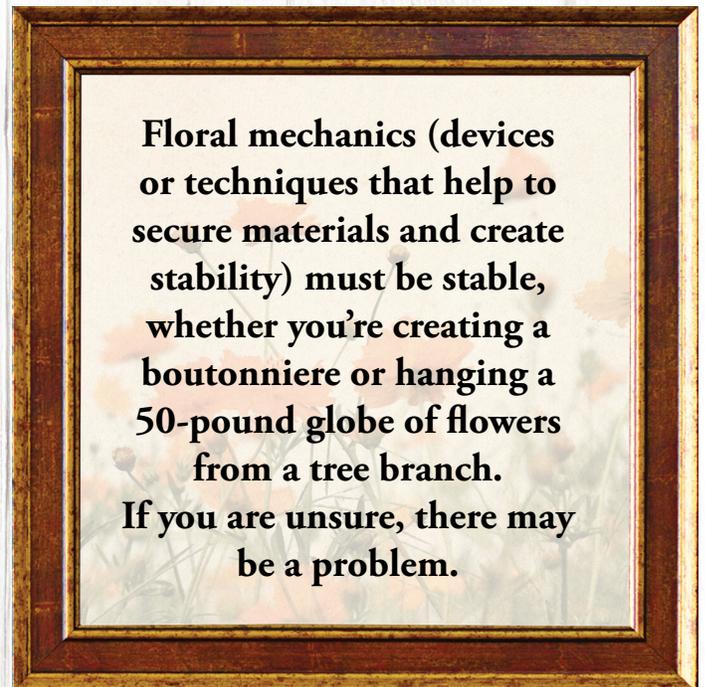
Photography can occur well ahead of the wedding.

It may be best to use both a legal pad and word processing program to take down information because it provides space to draw AND compose an electronic file. A computer makes a letter of sale estimate easier to compose.

II. Bridal Party Flowers

Now, it is time to delve into a discussion about flowers. You can lead the conversation by asking about the style of the wedding, what is envisioned, and what colors will be used. Steer the conversation toward bridesmaids first. They set the colors of the wedding so that floral discussions can follow.

It is important to sell color and theme. Paint a picture with your words so your clients can envision the end result. Use established color theory in your discussion. Tell the client what you know will work best. Avoid discussing stem counts because quantitative approaches do not work well in floral design. Never promise what you feel you cannot deliver.



When discussing the bridesmaids' dresses, ask about their cut and styling. This will reveal much about the wedding's style. Next, you can logically move to—

- Groomsmen
- Flower girl
- Ring bearer
- Bride and groom

Note that the bride and groom are discussed after the bridesmaids. This keeps the wedding focused on color first, then the types of plant materials you may use. The bride and groom often use white, but they may use other colors of flowers similar to the bridal party.

Continue with the parents and any other important people. Do not sell flowers for clergy who are in robes or vestments. Ask if they want flowers for siblings who are not bridesmaids or groomsmen. Remember hosts, guest book attendants, special friends and relatives, and godparents. Musicians and soloists not being monetarily compensated should receive flowers.

III. Ceremony Flowers

The wedding site is the next major section in the floral consultation. Focus on focal areas first, then sell the rest of the “look” or composition. For example, fresh arrangements, arches, and any items on the altar should be discussed first.

Pew markers, door decorations, and similar designs should be sold next. This helps the client to “spend the floral budget wisely” by decorating the focal areas of the space. Phrases like these assure the bride that you are helping her rather than taking advantage, and that you know what you are talking about.

When discussing flowers for places of worship, sell what is acceptable within the eyes of the church. If you are not sure, always consult your client. You don’t want to sell, design, and install something, only to find out at the last minute that it is not acceptable to the faith traditions within the church.



How and When to Bring Up the Budget

It is a good idea to work the budget into the conversation early if you get the feeling that your clients have a budget in mind or are buying a lot of products and services without considering costs. Getting the budget up-front saves time and helps create the wedding of their dreams with a profit for the farmer florist.

Some families will want to split flower costs and ask for guidance. Remember, this is a monetary transaction between two people, the bride and florist, not several people. Allow the bride to collect funds so that when you are paid, there is only once source for the collection of fees. Some common ways to divide wedding flower costs include:

- A 50/50 split between families
- Groom pays for bride’s flowers, all boutonnieres and corsages, and all rehearsal dinner flowers. Bride pays for all other flowers.
- Bride pays for all wedding flowers, while groom pays for rehearsal party flowers.



Simple Is Better

Bring impactful floral designs to focal areas. Avoid areas that really don't need flowers because no one will be looking in that direction.

Be aware of the lighting within the space, whether you are creating a setting at a hotel, a home, a barn, beachside, or in a church. You want the flowers to be seen. Dark or receding colors are usually a bad choice, even if they match the wedding colors, when used in spaces with little natural light (churches with stained-glass windows). Take into account weather shifts for outside weddings. Rain, wind, or other natural phenomena will change everything.

How much time is available to install and remove decor? Sometimes, weddings or services are scheduled back to back, leaving no time to install or remove many decorations. Some venues book limited blocks of time for ceremonies and receptions. In that block of time, you decorate the venue, the event takes place, and you remove the decorations. In these cases, focus on a few, impactful designs rather than many pew markers

Avoiding Hazards

Just because something is on social media does not mean that it is a good idea. A bride may want her social media image visualized by using soft candlelight throughout the wedding venue. This can indeed be accomplished, but open flames—candles that are not enclosed by glass hurricanes or cylinders—can catch fire.

It is not a good idea to use candles on the floor or ground where they can be tipped.

Another hazard is flowers or petals scattered on hard-surface floors. A fabric runner can keep this under control.



or auxiliary designs. Another option is to have a well-informed crew ready to take on the tasks quickly and effectively. There may be times when additional help is required. This help doesn't necessarily need to be from another floral designer—you may only need assistance with cleaning and moving materials.

Remember that the costs associated with additional employees will have to be factored into the wedding flower estimate. Knowing this information ahead of time keeps profits in place and separates a knowledgeable florist from someone who may have floral talent but little business sense. If you plan to pay an assistant \$20 per hour, at least \$40 per hour should be factored into the estimate.

During a sales consultation, keep in mind the durability of the designs. Explore water availability for flowers and avoid temperature extremes, both high and low. Floral decor must always look fresh and vibrant. Sweetpeas and peonies do not hold for very long in the heat of summer. If the bride wants wilt-sensitive flowers, perhaps she will require, and gladly

pay for, two bouquets instead of one. Never judge the content of your client's wallet based on your wallet.

IV. Reception Flowers

The wedding reception is next on the agenda. Think about the focal areas of a wedding reception, including bride's cake decorations, table centerpieces, and more. Some farmer florists will conduct the consultation at the reception venue to build the vision for the special event. Take into account the interior layout or plan. Consider placement of—

- Guest tables
- Buffets
- Cakes
- Band or disc jockey

Also consider the time of day and duration of the event and any effect on lighting. Flowers and decorations must be seen in order to be valuable. Be aware of guest and staff traffic flow to avoid blocking walkways or pathways. Adapt floral decorations to highlight and complement the space.

To Move or Not to Move?

Clients may be interested in repurposing their wedding floral designs. They may request that arrangements used in the ceremony space or bridesmaids' bouquets be moved to the reception space. This request may be easily accommodated, or it may not. It is a good idea to consider pros and cons before selling this service. It is indeed an additional service, so there should be an additional service charge.

Repurposing seems like a good idea, and it can be, but it is not always a beneficial outcome for the farmer florist. First, large designs made for altars are often three-sided, meaning that they have a non-decorative back. Creating all-around designs, finished on all sides, may not solve the problem. These designs could be displayed on altars and on buffet tables, but the problem is that the buffet would already be set with food, and there may not be enough room left for floral decorations.

Another pitfall is that some guests forego the ceremony and may already be present at the reception site. The florist will have to invade that space to set up and freshen the arrangements after a quick delivery. All of this commotion takes away from the reception's elegance. Some guests will get the mistaken idea that the florist was late or delivered the wrong arrangement.

One solution is to suggest a 50/50 or 60/40 cost split for larger designs. Instead of a \$300 altar design, a \$150 ceremony arrangement and a similarly priced food table design would provide beautiful displays and allow flowers to be in place well ahead of pictures and guests.

There is no standard solution to this problem. You should suggest what you feel is best for the client, the sale, and the business opportunity.



See It in the Right Light

To get the best understanding of light levels, visit ceremony and reception sites at the time of day when the wedding will be held. A poolside wedding site will look completely different in the morning than it does in the evening. Seeing a site in the same intensity (brightness) and quality (sunlight, LED, candlelight) of light will help you make professional suggestions on the best colors and types of flowers.

Think about how much time is available to install and remove decor. At the end of the reception or the next day, rental props and leftover designs must be removed. Often, it is best to sell your designs in their containers so they will become the client's property. This way, the bride's family can give these arrangements to party guests, for example.

Now is a good time to suggest flowers for the rehearsal party. The groom's family is traditionally in charge of this event, but it does not hurt to suggest that your farm can provide floral decorations.

V. Terms of Sale

The final step is the business part of the consultation. Make this your favorite part by setting and abiding by your particular business policies.

Here, communicate the terms of sale, percentage or down-payment fee, and final payment due date. It is recommended that the balance be paid in full 1 month before the wedding date. This will provide enough time for a check to clear the bank. Do not allow clients to provide payment at the wedding. By then, their accounts may be depleted, leaving the florist and other vendors unpaid for a long time. Review all products and services included so that everything is clear to all parties.

If possible, it is best to get a down payment at this point of the sale, but most consumers will want to know the final price before they offer payment. Extend an incentive, but only if needed. For example, "If you book with me today, we will provide you with a complimentary toss bouquet." Another technique is to tell the client that your floral services are available that weekend and a deposit will hold the date of the wedding. If they do not make a down payment, another bride may book for that day.

Do not offer discounts. They are usually worthless to both parties in the long run. Couples buy a beautiful picture of love and emotion for their wedding day, not a stem count or a cut-rate bouquet. Periodically review your profits to see that your company gets the return on investment of product and time.

What If the Budget Is Too High?

If the client needs to cut back after receiving her floral estimate, cut fringe items. For example, instead of reducing the cost of each item on the estimate—her bouquet, the bridesmaids' bouquets, corsages, and more—merely cut pew markers from 18 to 4. Instead of 20 centerpieces at \$50 each, cut that number to 10, then design a \$20 bud vase/candle combination for the remainder. Always concentrate all labor efforts toward profitable products and services.

Knowing what to charge may seem difficult to you now, but you will learn with practice. Many florists start with a simple 4:1 markup. If you pay \$1 for a flower, retail it for \$4 in wedding work. Some florists mark up more, some less. A message to take away is to provide a bottom-line figure for the entire wedding. You can address individual items, but the person who signs the check needs clarity. Do not “lowball” your pricing. It is possible to lower an estimate, but probably not to raise it. This can be addressed in the business letter estimate.

Wedding floral design is a business, not a hobby. Set and follow terms of sale such as required deposit (flat amount or percentage of sale), balance due, allowable and unallowable changes, and cancellation details.

Develop a professional friendship with your clients. Be honest—sell and deliver your best. If you sense a red flag during or after the consultation, that feeling is probably alerting you to potential problems.



Sample Wedding Estimate Business Letter

[Date]

[Client name and address]

Dear [Name]:

I want to thank you for your time and interest in discussing your wedding flowers with me. It was a pleasure to meet you, and I hope that you will choose us to provide beautifully designed fresh flowers and foliage from [flower farm name]. We pride ourselves on using Mississippi-raised flowers and foliage whenever possible. We feel this provides a distinctive look that is quintessentially Southern and most memorable for your family and guests.

Please see the following information and list for your wedding flowers.

[Date]

[Site], [Time]. Photos begin at [time].

Reception following, [Location].

Bride: [Brief description].	price
Matching flower crown	price
Groom's boutonniere, organic	price
[No.] Bridesmaids: [Brief description]	price
Matching flower crown	price
[No.] Groomsmen's boutonnieres	price
Flower girl basket and crown	price
3 Mothers' [Brief description]	price
3 Fathers' boutonnieres	price
Altar setting [Brief description]	price
Gateway arch of flowers and fresh foliage	price
16 mixed greenery pew markers	price
Bride's and Groom's cakes, trimmed	price
20 table centerpieces [Brief description]	price
3 Buffet table designs	price
Subtotal	price
State sales tax	price
<hr/>	
Total	price

The prices quoted reflect lush, full designs of premium seasonal blooms. These prices also include full servicing, which includes delivery, installation, and removal from your wedding and reception venues. Please know that we are most willing to work with a budget.

We request 50% of the total cost to place your wedding date on our calendar. The balance must be paid in full no later than 30 days before your wedding date. We will honor this letter of contract for 14 days or until another party books the date, whichever comes first.

I hope that we will be your florist and help to make your wedding day an event to remember. Please feel free to contact me. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Farmer Florist]

Sample Sales Sheet

I. Vital Information

Bride	Groom
Mailing Address	Mailing Address
Home	Home
Cell	Cell
Email	Email

Rehearsal dinner date, time, and location

Ceremony date, time, and location

Reception date, time, and location

Photography begins at what time?

When will florist have access to spaces to begin decoration?

II. Bridal Party

Bridesmaids

Flowers to carry

Flowers to wear

Junior bridesmaids

Flowers to carry

Flowers to wear

Flower girls

Flowers to carry

Flowers to wear

Groomsmen

Ring bearer

Pets

Bride

Groom

Bride's mother and father

Groom's mother and father

Stepparents

Grandparents

Additional flowers to wear

III. Ceremony Site

- Altar
- Arch/canopy
- Pews
- Vestibule/entry
- Doors/railings
- Plant rental
- Candlelight
- Additional decor
- Petal toss

IV. Reception Site

- Bride's cake
- Groom's cake
- Arch/canopy
- Backdrops
- Centerpieces
- Table numbers
- Head table
- Doors/entry
- Lighting
- Linen
- Candy buffet display
- Plant rental
- Candlelight
- Toss bouquet
- Garter
- Favors
- Additional decor
- Subcontracted products and services

V. Terms of Payment

- Subtotal
- State sales tax
- Total
- Deposit
- Balance due 1 month before wedding date

Wedding Floral Emergency Kit

Pack these tools and supplies to make a wedding ceremony or reception a breeze.

#12-gauge aluminum wire

Anti-transpirant spray

Apron with pockets

Cable ties

Chenille stems

Corsage and boutonniere pins

Drop cloth (bed sheet)

Duct tape

Extra flowers and foliage in water

Extra ribbon

Extra wire, stem wrap, and floral adhesive

First aid kit

Glass cleaner and paper towels

GPS

Knives/scissors/pruners

Lighters

Map/directions to venues

Plastic water pitcher or small bucket

Trash bags

Waterproof tape





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