



BY ADRIENNE MASON

FROM THE GROUND UP

Growing a flower business in the frozen North

THE SNAPDRAGONS in Rowan Brown's garden are more than waist high, with blooms in hues of rich burgundy and raspberry. They're the most treasured flowers on her Whitehorse farm. She grows them from seed she gathered in her late grandmother's garden on Vancouver Island—the same grandmother who inadvertently set Brown on the path toward becoming a flower farmer.

In her online search for a florist to send a bouquet to her grandmother's island home, Brown once found a farmer-florist who delivered an arrangement her grandmother loved. The fresh-picked flowers were so unlike the formulaic arrangements florists typically offer, with their heavy reliance on the carnations, roses and chrysanthemums that can withstand shipping. Instead, the bouquet had a loose, garden-gathered look. "There was so much life and personality in those flowers," Brown says. "I just wanted to learn more." As she researched the niche yet growing small-scale flower-farming industry, she realized no one was doing it in the Yukon.

Cut flowers in the territory typically come from wholesalers in B.C. or Alberta, who are, in turn, largely selling flowers grown overseas. Those flowers *are* the floristry chain as it exists today. But a new wave of smaller growers like Brown, who established The Boreal Florist in 2021, are offering something different, though Brown is doing so under particularly challenging circumstances. Running a flower farm in Whitehorse—where there are roughly 90 frost-free days a year—the environment itself is against you. There's no farm-supply store, so shipping costs for basic growing equipment quickly add up. Available (and affordable) growing space is also at a premium. Despite these obstacles, Brown is one of two women running a full-time flower business in the North.

Standing in Brown's fields in September, just days after the season's first frost, you'd hardly guess that weather posed a hurdle. Cosmos, strawflowers, sunflowers and yarrow still blossom. Her small greenhouse is full of lilies, buds ready to burst open, and pots of lush eucalyptus, their spicy scent tinging the air. But the question of how to get the most out of the short growing season is one Brown is constantly asking. The same is true for Erin Dixon, who established Yukon Butterflies Flower Farm on her Dawson City acreage after finding there was nowhere in town to buy a corsage when her daughter graduated high school in 2023.

Both Dixon and Brown learned their trade by way of online courses, advice from YouTube and Instagram growers and their own trial and error. Brown tried dahlias, for instance, but they were just coming into bloom when the first frost hit. Dixon, who grows in Dawson's slightly warmer microclimate, has had success with dahlias.

Brown farms on her parents' acreage in the Takhini River Valley. She grows everything from seed. The plants get their start under grow lights each February, on wire shelves in the kitchen of her Porter Creek condo. Brown coddles her seedlings, constantly monitoring water, light and temperature for months before transferring them to outdoor beds. Dixon's season starts much the



Erin Dixon
grows fresh
flowers in
Dawson City.



Rowan Brown
dries flowers
to sell in the
off-season.