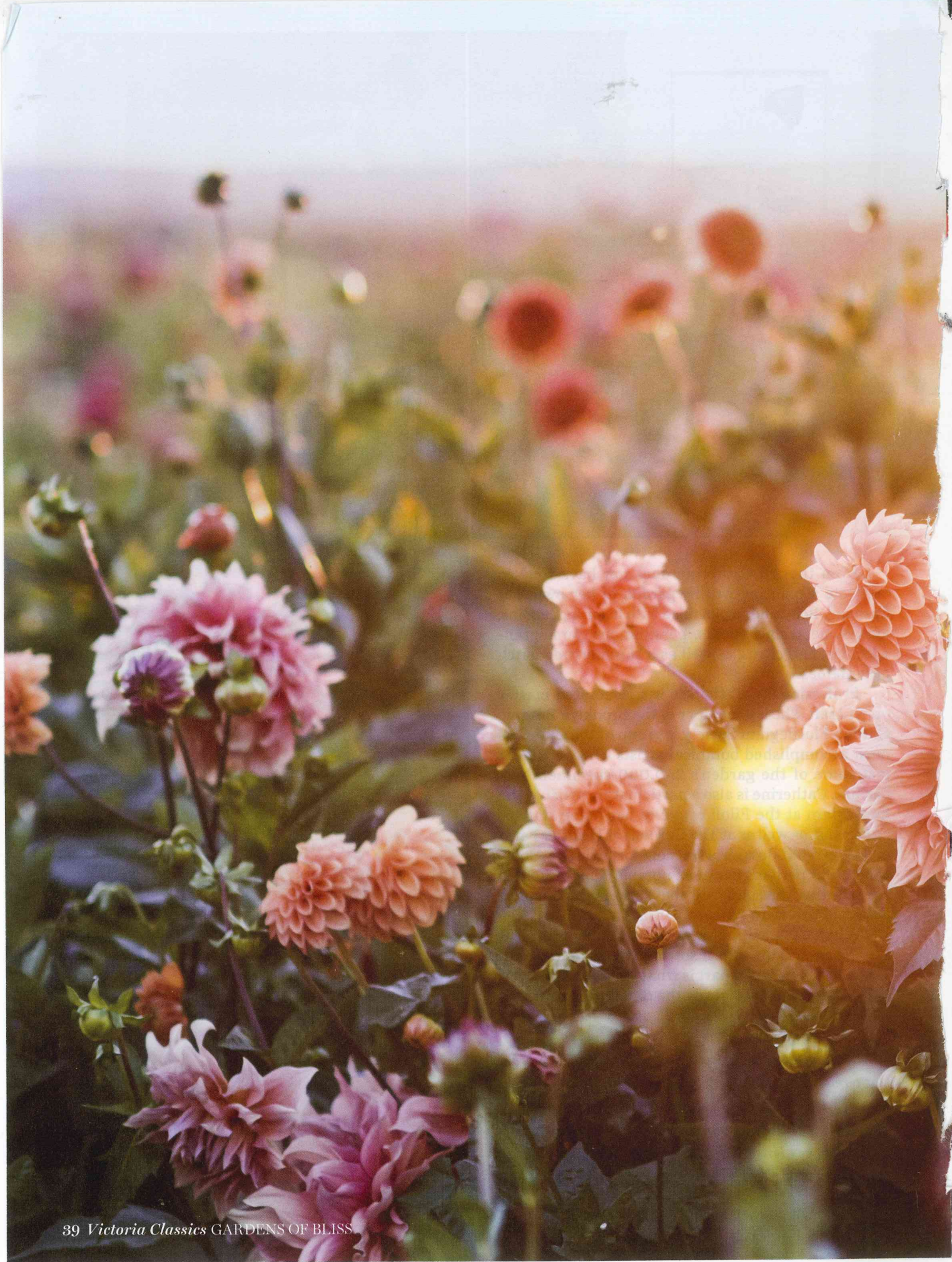




Floral TREASURES

Pressed for safekeeping or gathered into splendid bouquets, blossoms engender delight that outlasts their temporal nature.

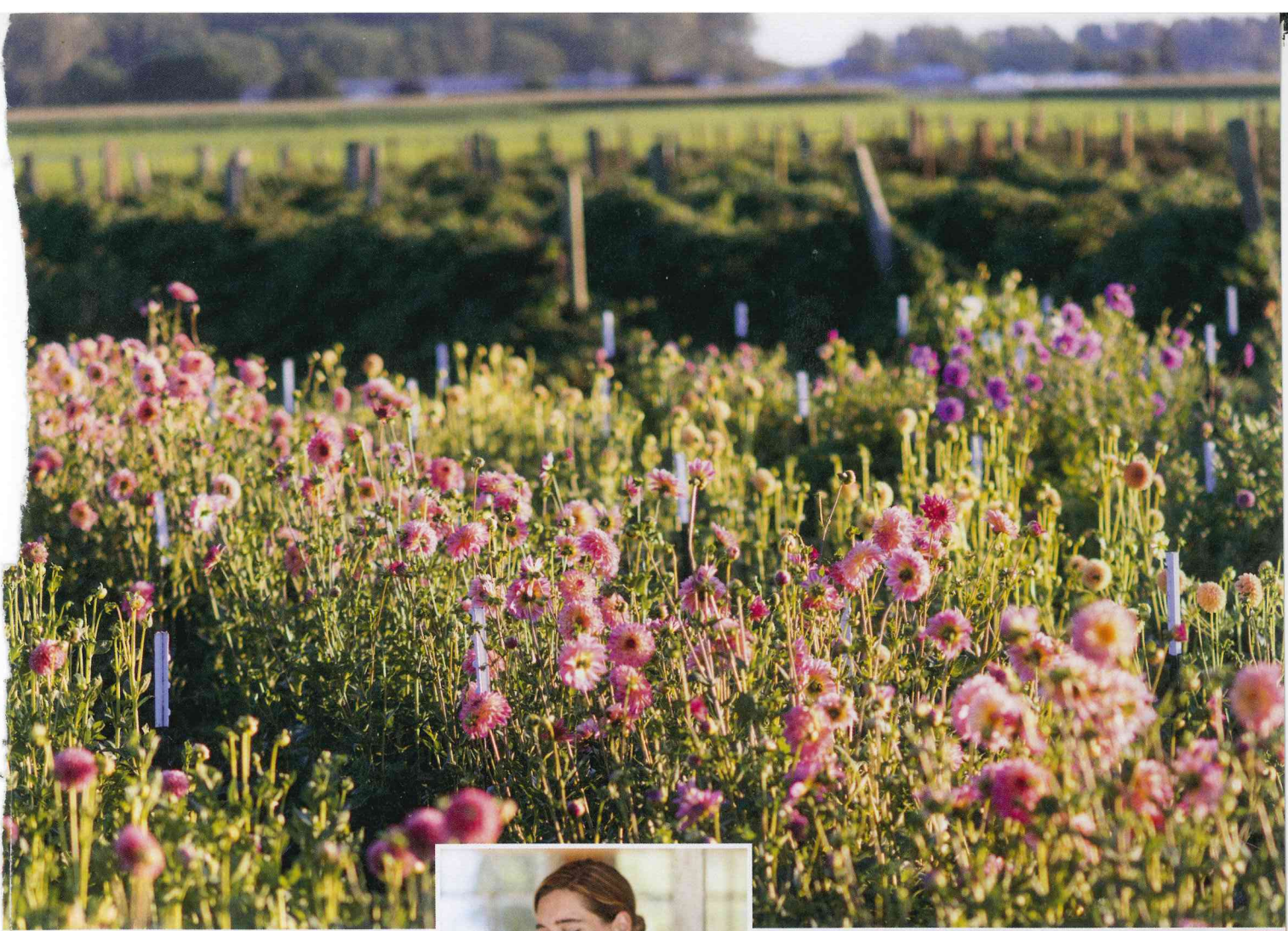
Enjoy these sentimental offerings of botanical gifts.





GLEANINGS
from the *Garden*

With countless varieties just waiting to be plucked, farmer-florist Erin Benzakein strolls through her flower beds in search of the perfect components to create coveted arrangements.

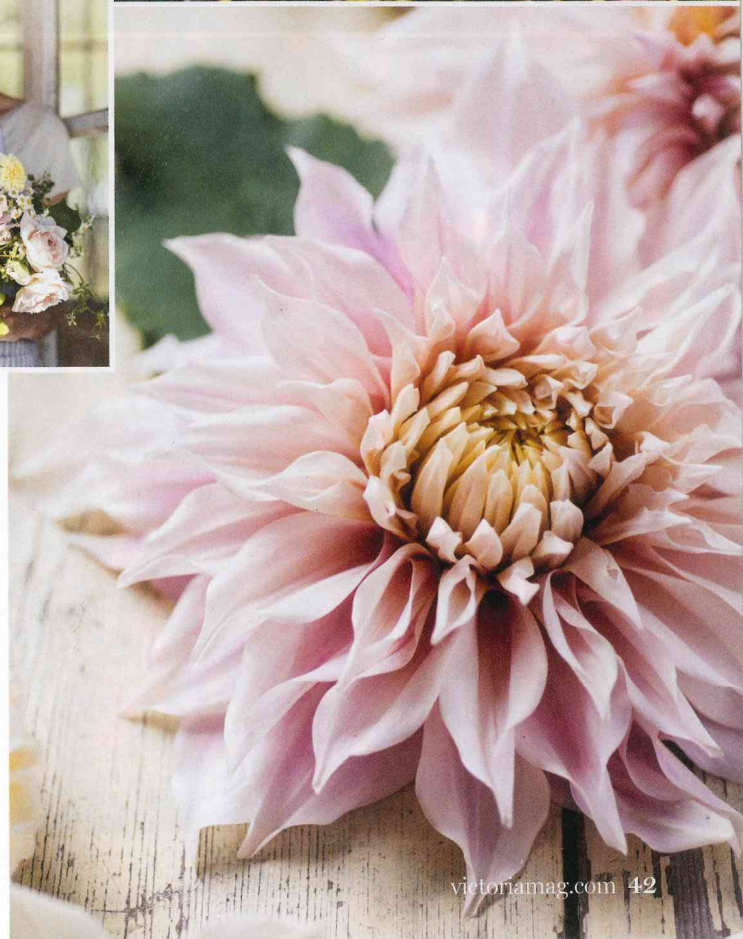


As anyone with a passion for gardening knows, the heart-stirring need to turn the soil, tuck in seeds, and tenderly nurture each tiny sprout must be indulged. For Erin Benzakein, that yearning began with a 2-acre plot of land and a big dream that has blossomed into a thriving business, christened simply Floret.



Both a farm and a floral-design studio, Floret has drawn the attention of growers and consumers alike who support the local-flower renaissance taking place today around the globe. Erin's husband and two children work alongside her, making it a true family affair. With her quick success, this Washington State resident once contemplated expanding to a larger plot of land. "As we explored increasing our footprint, something just didn't sit right," she says. "Bigger isn't always better. So instead, we decided to hone our craft and focus our attention on perfecting the fine art of small-scale, high-intensity flower production."

Dahlias have always held sway in Erin's compact garden. Remarkably complex, they are actually composed



Below: The graceful curves of honeysuckle vines lend both lithesome movement and unpretentious charm to this arrangement filled with decidedly feminine flora. Sunburst-shaped dahlias blend beautifully with smaller blooms in shades of pink. Bottom: Erin Benzakein harvests flowers along the paths in her garden.



of many individual flowers called florets—which makes them particularly appropriate posies for this eponymous venture. The entrepreneur started with just a few tubers a friend had given her, but the versatile blooms quickly became one of her all-time favorites. She now cultivates more than four thousand dahlia plants among the crowded rows of sweet peas, zinnias, and other selections that make up the business's sizable inventory.

Dahlias, which are native to Mexico, boast more than forty varieties, range in size from petite to “dinner plate,” and can be found in every color but true blue. Erin believes the flowers are a wonderful addition to any late-summer bouquet, as they present countless design possibilities.

With hundreds of weddings and other special events in her portfolio, Erin generously shares her expertise at workshops, on her blog, and in books (she is working on a new guide to cut-flower gardening, due out in fall 2016). For her, inspiration begins and ends in the garden. “I pay close attention to how the plants are growing in their natural habitat and then mimic that in the vase,” she says. “Arching stems, scrambling vines, movement, and wildness are all key ingredients in every bouquet.”



Design Elements

Using these components, you can create your own version of the stunning arrangement pictured opposite top:

1. Honeysuckle
2. Foxglove
3. Snowberry
4. Seven-son flower
5. Japanese anemone
6. 'Kathryn Morley' garden rose
7. 'Cafe au Lait' dahlia
8. 'Bracken Rose' dahlia
9. Aster



"To potter with green growing things, watching each day to see the dear, new sprouts come up, is like taking a hand in creation. I think. Just now my garden is like faith—the substance of things hoped for."

—LUCY MAUD MONTGOMERY

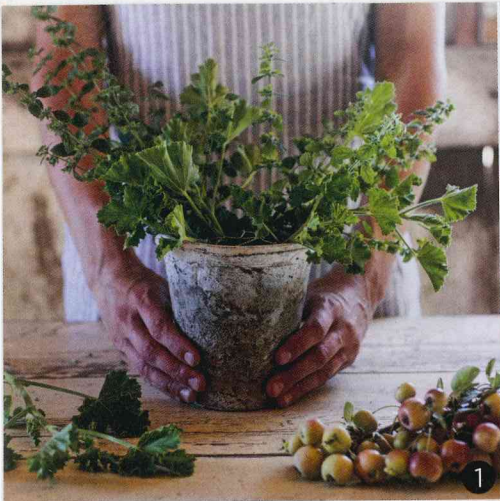




When creating a setting for a special occasion, in addition to displaying floral elements in a traditional centerpiece, consider using them in unexpected ways. "Flowers are the perfect finishing touch for any celebratory table," says Erin. "I love to tuck delicate blossoms in napkin ties, nestle them on top of cakes, and sprinkle them around anything that needs a little extra dose of beauty." Roses and dahlias are especially lovely choices because of their wide range of hues and varieties, as well as their ability to remain fresh. Left: The botanical theme is echoed here with an array of petits fours adorned with delicate posies made of icing.



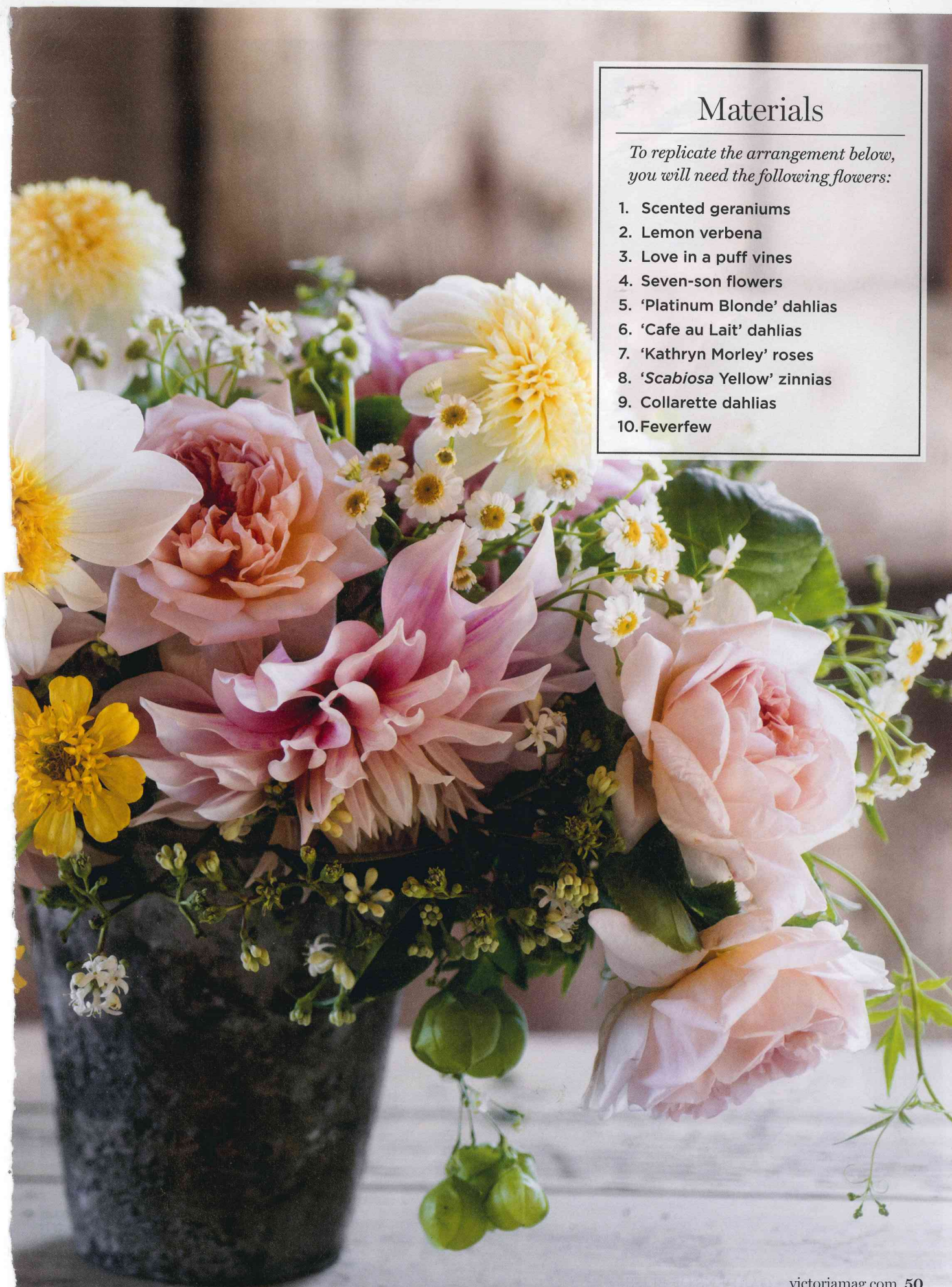




Step-by-Step

Erin shares her instructions for assembling this pretty springtime bouquet (also pictured on the cover of the magazine):

1. Establish the shape of the arrangement by using different types of foliage. (Erin chose scented geraniums and lemon verbena to form the framework.)
2. Add textural elements to give the bouquet movement and interest. (Erin's features love in a puff vines and seven-son flowers.)
3. Insert the larger focal flowers before the arrangement gets too full. (Erin selected 'Platinum Blonde' and soft pink 'Cafe au Lait' dahlias.) Working in groups of three to five, nestle the statement blossoms into the foliage base.
4. Layer in a collection of supporting blooms smaller than the main flowers. (Erin's bouquet includes 'Kathryn Morley' roses, 'Scabiosa Yellow' zinnias, and Collarette dahlias.) For the finishing touch, tuck in a few stems of an airy plant to fill out the arrangement—feverfew is a lovely ingredient for this task.



Materials

To replicate the arrangement below, you will need the following flowers:

1. Scented geraniums
2. Lemon verbena
3. Love in a puff vines
4. Seven-son flowers
5. 'Platinum Blonde' dahlias
6. 'Cafe au Lait' dahlias
7. 'Kathryn Morley' roses
8. 'Scabiosa Yellow' zinnias
9. Collarette dahlias
10. Feverfew