



OUR DIGITAL EDITIONS

Click here to watch a video about Bloomaker tulips. (See page 10 for details.)



Left: Bloomaker flowering tulip bulbs in hurricane vases. Here: Bloomaker head grower Jelte Schaap in the greenhouse.

PHOTOS COURTESY BLOOMAKER

Beautiful blooms

Bloomaker successfully changes the bulb

BY CHRISTINA GUERRERO

JOEP PATERNOSTRE, founder and CEO of Bloomaker, a Costco supplier, has more than just a green thumb. He has a green heart.



Joep Paternostre

Paternostre has turned his passion for flowers into Bloomaker, a blossoming floral business that is the leading producer and wholesale supplier of

hydroponically grown flowers in North America. “We started a complete new venture with this new idea,” he says. “And that’s where our American success story started. They called it the American dream.”

Paternostre started in the flower bulb industry in Normandy, France, in 1985. In 1991, he founded his own business producing packed flower bulbs in the Netherlands. Between 1992 and 1999, he created, purchased and consolidated several bulb businesses into one company. In 2000, he merged the business with another bulb company in the Netherlands.

In 2002, Paternostre and his wife, Lilian, decided to venture into the North American market and spent a year traveling by RV throughout the U.S. and Canada to find the right location and environment to start a floral business. They eventually decided on Waynesboro, Virginia, but during that year, inspired by changes in the industry, they developed a system to grow bulb flowers, such as tulips and hyacinths, hydroponically. From December through May, in a 3-acre greenhouse, they can produce as much as a 40-acre nursery, Paternostre notes.

“If you look at the potted tulips, they need constant water. They need to be watered in the stores. That is why very often you see one tulip grow, and another tulip is lagging, and another tulip falls over,” he says.

Bloomaker’s tulips, in contrast, are more “consumer friendly” because they

grow uniformly and consistently—thanks to plenty of light and water, which is continuously fed in the roots.

Bloomaker begins the process by importing bulbs from the Netherlands. The bulbs are chilled at a low temperature for 14 weeks. Next they are planted on patented pin trays and water is added. It takes one to two weeks for the rooting to finish, and then they are crated in the greenhouse with lots of light to help them develop short stems.

“We don’t want to have them stretched too tall; whereas, if you look at cut flowers, they actually put them in greenhouses, but they make it sort of dark because they want them to stretch. They want them to be very tall, and for us that [is not the case] because [if] they are short, they’re also stronger. The stems are thicker and they just look much better,” Paternostre says.

When the tulips begin showing a bit of color at the tip, they are placed in display vases and shipped out to Bloomaker’s customers. This process allows the company to produce about 2.5 million vases every year in only a few months, and the tulips last much longer than conventional tulips, he says. **C**

COMPANY INFO

COMPANY Bloomaker
FOUNDER AND CEO Joep Paternostre

EMPLOYEES 20, plus 60 seasonal from October through May

HEADQUARTERS Waynesboro, Virginia

WEBSITE bloomaker.com

ITEMS AT COSTCO Tulips with bulbs attached, in hurricane vases, through mid-March (Item #32764)

QUOTE ABOUT COSTCO

“Working with Costco for us has always been a huge pleasure. There is not one other business model that I know that is so successful as Costco, as well for the employees as for their [members], and it was always an example for us to work that way.”—Joep Paternostre, founder and CEO of Bloomaker

