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# Tulips have become Holland's trademark flower

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“When it's Spring again I'll bring again, tulips from Amsterdam. With a heart that's true I'll give to you, tulips from Amsterdam. I can't wait until the day you fill these eager arms of mine. Like the windmill keeps on turning, that's how my heart keeps on yearning. For the day I know we can share these tulips from Amsterdam.” ~ Tulips from Amsterdam, a popular song recorded in 1958 by British entertainer Max Bygraves (1922-2012).

When you hear the word “tulips,” which country comes to mind? Most people will answer Holland and with good reason. The Netherlands accounts for nearly 90 percent of the world's total area of tulip farms planted annually, about 11,000 hectares.

According to HollandTrade.com, the Dutch produce 4.3 billion tulip bulbs each year, some 53 percent of which (2.3 billion) are made into cut flowers. Approximately 40 percent of these cut flowers are exported outside Holland, with the majority staying in Europe.

Tulips were imported from Turkey into Holland in the 16th century, according to Holland.com.

When Flemish botanist Carolus Clusius wrote the first major book about tulips in 1592, they became so popular that his garden was raided and bulbs stolen on a regular basis.

The weather in Holland is ideal for growing tulips, with its long, cool springs and moist, well-drained soils. Tulip season (January-April) is officially inaugurated each year on National Tulip Day in January when Dutch tulip growers create a massive temporary garden filled with 200,000 tulips in front of the royal palace on Dam Square in Amsterdam. Anyone is allowed to pick free tulips from the garden and more than 10,000 people usually do so.

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The yearly tulip flower shows in the Netherlands are a time when new breeds are presented and some of them are worth hundreds of dollars apiece.

“It’s wonderful to see the breeders of these new tulips,” Pieter Landman, owner at Blooming Vision BV in the Netherlands, told *The Produce News*. “How they kneel in front of the tulips to massage the stems and leaves with their large, dirty hands to make them look the best for the jury and the visitors at these shows. At that moment, they are more in love with the new tulip than with their wives.”

Many tulip festivals are held annually throughout the Netherlands from late April to early May, including a huge one in the middle of the tulip fields of Noordoostpolder, Flevoland, Holland’s biggest flower-growing region. Windmills, wooden shoes, cheese markets and millions of multi-colored tulips celebrate spring and delight thousands of tourists.

Dutch people took their love of tulips with them abroad when they settled and now there are also tulip festivals in North America every spring, such as the Tulip Time Festival in Holland, MI; the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival in Skagit Valley, WA; the Tulip Time Festival in Orange City and Pella, Iowa; and the Canadian Tulip Festival in Ottawa, Canada.

According to HollandTrade.com, the Netherlands has a dominant share of the world trade in all floriculture products, at 50 percent; in bulbs the share is 80 percent. The world’s largest auction company for cut flowers and plants is also Dutch. It has 4,100 employees and each day it sells 34.5 million flowers and 2.3 million plants and conducts 120,000 transactions using 46 clocks.

The flower industry is more than five percent of the Netherlands’ gross domestic product. No wonder Holland is often called the “flower shop of the world.”

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