

GROWERTALKS

Columns

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Sustainability: From Big Idea to Your Store

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In the last issue I told you that sustainability, far from being a new and problematic concept, is part of the DNA of the large and small family businesses that make up the green industry. From the Huntingtons of Pleasant View Gardens to the Araujos of Araujo Farms, growers and retailers have been sustaining families, communities and an entire industry for generations.

And no topic has more relevance to the physical attributes of the store. More than ever, Paco Underhill's claim that the store is "a great big advertisement for itself" applies to sustainability as a building and renovation process.

But what is green building and how do the practices involved support the green industry? Two major areas of sustainability relate to green building opportunities in the horticulture industry: rain harvesting and alternative energy. Greenhouses and the products they produce and house have the potential to be some of the most efficient rain harvesters and solar collectors on the planet. Two major sources of information are available in these two areas of sustainability in construction.

The American Rain Harvesting Catchment Systems Association (ARCSA) offers classes leading to accreditation in rain harvesting practices. I spent one of the most enlightening days of my life with Billy Kniffin, an Extension Agent from Texas and an expert on rain harvesting. Billy's homemade apparatus for demonstrating the impact of soil and vegetation on rain as it soaks into the ground or runs off in a torrent wouldn't have won the local high school science fair contest. But it sure showed just what water does in different conditions. Rain harvesting is relatively new in this country; however, in Australia, new home construction permits require a rain catchment system. Rain harvesting is taking the rain barrel to new heights.

On an even larger scale, the U.S. Green Building Council is rewriting the rules for sustainable building in this country. USGBC's LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification program awards points in six categories resulting in the highly desirable LEED Certification. After attending two training programs, I'm currently studying for the LEED Accreditation exam (I'll keep you posted on my progress).

In the meantime, a 100-year-old horticulture business in Pennsylvania is exploring options for LEED certification of a major renovation. Preliminary evaluations suggest LEED is no problem and LEED Gold is an option. In LEED certification categories like Energy & Atmosphere and Indoor Environmental Quality, their fresh air buildings really rack up the points.

Clearly, sustainability is more than just earth-friendly gardening products; it's the greatest opportunity our industry has been offered to take a leadership role in an area of extraordinary consumer interest.

In keeping with the Green Profit/GrowerTalks Consumer Sandwich, here are the benefits to all parties:

- Consumers: Greater confidence in local retailers who incorporate sustainable practices in their business development.
- Retailer: Store development that creates an authentic, unique selling position and opportunities for community relations and education.
- Suppliers: Providing store development practices and products that make the store itself a statement in sustainability.

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Seeking Out Sustainability

American Rain Harvesting Catchment Systems Association: www.arcsa.org.

U.S. Green Building Council: www.usgbc.org. USGBC will hold its Greenbuild International Conference and Expo (www.greenbuildexpo.org) in Boston, November 19-21, 2008.

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