

# GROWERTALKS

## Features

6/27/2013

## A College Class Asks: Why Don't People Garden?

Chris Beytes



The reason for our visit? Last fall, at the suggestion of Diane Blazek, head of the National Garden Bureau, Joe assigned a project to his BUS 420 Marketing Research class to answer the question, “Why don’t people garden?” They also asked a second question, “How can we get people to garden?”

Joe likes to use “project-based learning” with his classes, so this real-world assignment was perfect. Joe broke his class into seven groups of three students

each, with each group employing one of seven research methods—causal experimentation, e-survey, focus groups, in-depth interviews, observation, phone survey and questionnaire (see sidebar).

*Pictured: BUS 420 at Manchester University. Left to right: Kurt Monix, Cody Schell, Matthew Winger, Ben Jacobs, Jamie Osborne, Michael Fansler, Lauren Weaver, Morgan Finke (holding note book), Joe Messer, Laura Lichauer, Scout Nickels, Laura Gladfelter, Lisa Stojanovich, Charles Snyder, Kenny Green, Diane Blazek, Erick Mentock, Stacey Ward and Kyle Konarski. (Not pictured but in the class were Jennifer Corajod, Felicia Fahey, Nathan Gage, Jeramey Hicks, Angelika Konik, Joshua Lofton, Dian Radev and Nancy Shitakha).*

The class’s findings, while not groundbreaking, serve to reinforce that we already know much about why non-gardeners remain non-gardeners. And it’s fascinating to read the potential solutions from these college seniors—some of which are tech-driven (a virtual gardening website) and some of which are old hat, at least to us (vertical gardening, container gardening).

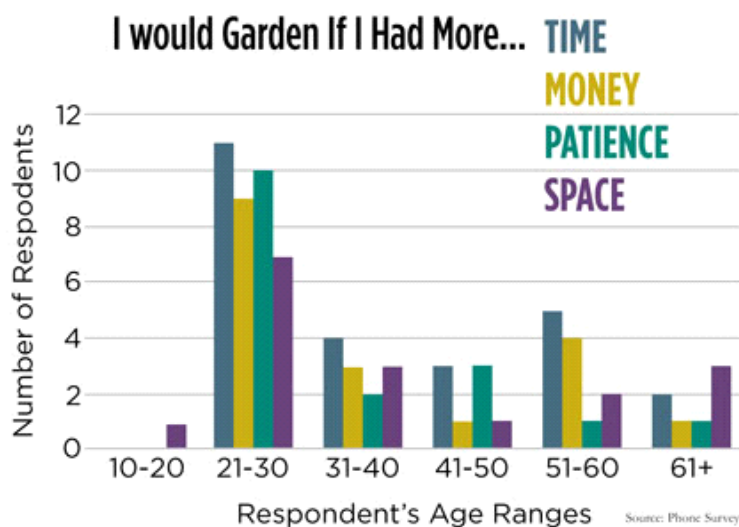
## The findings

According to the summary presented to NGB by the class, three main reasons for not gardening made up over 60% of the reasons given by survey respondents. These included time constraints, lack of knowledge/information and space restraints. Here's the class's summary of the three reasons, plus the class's suggested strategies for overcoming them.

**Time constraints.** Based on the information collected from various research methods, time was a leading factor regarding why people don't garden. Most respondents stated that they lack the time due to variables such as work, family and other extracurricular activities. This made it clear that the opportunity cost of gardening was too high when compared to other activities. In addition, those individuals that had attempted to garden in the past realized they couldn't continue to take care of the garden due to various time constraints and, as a result, have stopped.

**The solution:** In order to overcome time restraints, the National Garden Bureau can use advertising as an influential tool to demonstrate that gardening is not as time consuming as perceived. This could be done by using statistical analysis on the average time required to develop and maintain a garden. NGB could also advertise the use of indoor potted plants as a timesaving solution versus an outdoor garden. These advertisements should be targeted toward a younger demographic, because it was found that this demographic tended to note that not enough time was one of the largest hindrances to gardening.

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**Lack of Knowledge/Information.** Another reason as to why people don't garden was due to the lack of information and the misinterpretation of the definition of gardening. Not only do potential gardeners lack information, garden center employees of large retailers also lack the training and in-depth knowledge to be of assistance to gardeners. Also, the information that's available in stores, such as pamphlets or flyers, tends to be unappealing and intimidating.

**The solution:** There are multiple solutions to this problem. NGB could assist retailers by creating simpler flyers for novice gardeners so they seem less intimidating. NGB could also assist garden centers by providing employees with a basic understanding of what type of information people are lacking. Based on the data collected, it was found that respondents discussed there being a lack of information on topics such as cost, plant breeds, space requirements and troubleshooting information (bug/mite removal, what plants grow well with each other, sun versus shade plants, and identifying the difference between weeds and plants.) Not only could NGB provide information to retailers, but also directly to consumers through a virtual gardening website that would allow gardeners to experiment with maintaining a garden.

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**Space Restraints.** Space restraints are yet another one of the top reasons why people don't garden. Many of the respondents lived in cities or very populated areas and believed that they currently lack the adequate

space to develop a garden. Not having sufficient space to garden also discourages people from finding alternative gardening methods. Because of potential population growth, this issue will become even more prevalent.

**The solution:** Some alternative gardening methods could be vertical gardening and container gardening. Vertical gardening saves space because it allows the plants to extend upwards rather than horizontally. This can be done by providing a support frame for the upward growth of the plants. Container gardening is planting all flowers or plants in containers rather than directly in the ground. This method allows individuals to keep plants in a confined space, such as a deck or indoors, versus dedicated yard space. Advertising these methods of gardening and their benefits to the public may increase the amount of gardeners in the United States. **GT**

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## Methodology

Below is a brief overview of each research method my students used to address the market research question, “Why don’t people garden?”

### Causal Experimentation

This type of experiment looks to identify the cause-and-effect relationship. If I do this does it cause that? Educational flyers, flower bulbs or both were handed out to 54 participants at various retail locations. Out of the 54 participants, 36 individuals responded to the follow-up survey, communicating why they reacted to the variable the way they did.

### E-Survey

The e-survey consisted of 12 demographic, geographic and psychographic questions that were hosted by the website. The survey itself was distributed using Facebook, Reddit, Twitter and word-of-mouth. On Facebook, an event was specifically created to invite users to join the event and take the survey. The survey was completed by 1,031 participants nationwide, of whom 682 were non-gardeners.

### Focus Group

The focus group was conducted by two moderators and one observer who interviewed two different groups of respondents with prepared questions. During the focus groups, respondents were asked open-ended questions from a prepared list, but then were also asked additional questions based on their responses.

### In-Depth Interview

In-depth interviews were conducted using a one-on-one interview method with five non-gardeners and one gardener. An interview guide was developed to ensure that specific topics were covered, but the conversation also expanded past the questions to enhance the quality of the interview.

### Observation

The observational method involved physically observing and recording variables found in different households in different geographic locations in order to determine how many homeowners potentially gardened. In addition, two stores, a nursery and gardening websites were observed. *(Editor’s note: This is the method used by the author for his River Ridge Survey.)*

### **Phone Survey**

The phone survey consisted of both open-ended and limited-response questions that were used to obtain both quantitative and qualitative information about why people do not garden. The respondents included gardeners and non-gardeners to help understand what might motivate non-gardeners to garden, and what discourages people from gardening.

### **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire consisted of one page of semi-open-ended and guided questions. Of the 98 respondents, 37 were self-identified non-gardeners. The data analyzed came from these 37 non-gardeners. The survey consisted of six gardening and two demographic questions. GT

—*Joe Messer*

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## **A Farmer is Born**

During my visit, I asked the class if any of them had a new appreciation for gardening, having now been immersed in the topic for a semester. One young woman replied, “I’m helping my boyfriend with his garden this summer, and I wouldn’t have done that before the project.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“I don’t like getting dirty.”

To which everyone laughed, of course. But she continued, “But I saw the benefit in it, and I saw that it was a good thing. And now we’re going out and selling our produce at farmers’ markets and such.”

—*C.B.*