

GROWERTALKS

Columns

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Taking Out the Intimidation Factor

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Gardening is evolving and there is one way to grow along with it—simplify and inspire! Our goal: reach the next generation of gardeners in a way that engages them from the start. Our challenge: to provide simple solutions that encourage new consumers and take the intimidation out of gardening. It's up to us to lead young folks to the garden center and inspire them to garden on their terms.

Gardening is hard work. When it comes to planting, the sense of accomplishment and the reward is well worth the effort. I believe the word “easy” is a bit misleading; I prefer the term “simple.” “Easy” is a buzzword that implies little effort is needed, while “simple” suggests, “even I can do it.” Let's offer our new market of consumers simple solutions and projects that help them visualize, use and enjoy the products we're selling. That will motivate and compel them to shop the garden center and get outside.

Gardening is expensive. Studies have shown that younger generations are willing to pay higher prices for items they want. Thinking of this for the garden center, if plants are uninspiring we won't win their dollars. Displaying vibrant, healthy plants that show their uniqueness will grab a young shopper's attention. Creating uncomplicated projects at various price points and featuring how great our products are is key. They may buy fewer items, but they'll pay more for what they want; unique, novel and modern solutions are valuable.

As more young people become homeowners, they're creating a new group of consumers hitting our market. As a new homeowner myself, my first project was overhauling my overgrown, uninspiring landscape. I didn't have the money to totally reinvent my outdoor space, so I bought “statement” plants—items that brought interest and uniqueness to my landscape. My strategy was to buy the plants I liked best, not to buy more of the same. The value for me was in finding beautiful, inspiring varieties that work with my needs and individual style. As I add new plants next season, the style will evolve over time and bring me a new way to enjoy my outdoor space.

Gardening is approachable, not intimidating. While I'm not a fan of the recent trend to shield potential buyers from all of the difficult terminology and precise care instructions that inherently come along with horticulture, we need to rethink the way we present this information to the public. Consumers want simple, but they also want to be actively engaged and have details available if needed. Stripping hard-to-pronounce Latin names and specific fertilizer or watering needs from the label isn't the answer. We need to think of new ways of communicating. The next wave of consumers is great at processing huge amounts of information and they're

always digitally connected. We have to be the leaders who provide information in a new, approachable style with which they can quickly identify.

As a young voice in the horticulture industry, I know we must modernize our image and fast. Even the term “gardening” is old-fashioned, so our aim should be to provide fresh information to new consumers by using social media, fun projects and more interactive displays to get them interested. Dreaming up new ideas to merchandise and inform shoppers will help to modernize the outdoor living department at retail. And it doesn’t end there. Information must continue to engage them and peak their interest after their purchases, too.

We’re not only selling plants, we’re selling an outdoor lifestyle. With some fresh, out-of-the-box thinking, we can modernize the gardening image for a new set of buyers that will compel them to go outside and beautify their environment. By promoting the reward and providing inspiration with quality plants and unique ideas at retail that are both engaging and smart, we can motivate a new generation of unintimidated gardeners. **GT**

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