

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Could Amazon Dominate Our Industry?

Chris Beytes

What's to stop Amazon.com from getting into the flower and plant business ... and doing well at it?

We did some searching and found that they're already selling our stuff. Check the "Fresh Flowers & Live Indoor Plants" category under their grocery and gourmet food listing and you'll find 45 centerpieces, 2,395 fresh cut flower choices, 67 fresh sprays, 50 fresh wreaths and a whopping 2,802 live indoor plants.

There are plenty of perennial and herb plants available, too, like lavender, daylilies and hostas. You want trees? You can buy oak seedlings, a 1-gal. river birch or a 3- to 4-ft. bald cypress liner.

Who's doing the fulfillment? On the floral side, some big names, like 1-800-Flowers and Proflowers.com. But there are plenty of companies we've never heard of. "Bonsai Boy" owns the bonsai category, with 444 products offered. "Garden in the City" offers 74 different tillandsias. Hirt's Garden offers 88 different houseplants, from 4-in. spider plants (\$1.99, plus \$6.59 shipping) to an 8-in. fiddle-leaf fig (19.99 plus \$12.59 shipping).

A bit of research shows that Hirt's is no fly-by-night operation. They're a 101-year-old horticulture business based in Medina, Ohio. Sam Hirt started it in 1915, growing horseradish and vegetables. Eventually, a wholesale florist and retail business were added. The floral business was sold in 2014, but the third and fourth generations of Hirt's (Alan and Matthew) still run the retail business, albeit at a new location.

If you want annuals from Amazon, you have to be content with buying seed, at least for now. And you will pay dearly for it ... or almost nothing, depending on variety and source. For example, we searched calibrachoa and seeds of Kabloom will run you from a high of \$1.79 each (from Moonfarm Seeds, who'll sell you 10 pelleted seeds for \$14.96 plus \$2.99 shipping) down to just 6.5 cents each ("Ambizu" will sell you 100 Kabloom Crave Sunset seeds for \$6.50 and free shipping).

But caveat emptor is the rule of the day with seeds from Amazon. For instance, did you know that Angelonia Serenita is a non-GMO heirloom variety? Non-GMO, yes. But heirloom? PanAmerican Seed would be surprised to hear that, seeing how they introduced it in 2012. **GT**