

GROWERTALKS

Front Lines

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George Ball on the Gardening Boom

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Anna Ball's brother George, Chairman of W. Atlee Burpee in Warminster, Pennsylvania, wrote an editorial in the January 4 edition of *The Wall Street Journal*. I appreciate his fine message in front of an elite audience that's now aware of the boom that gardening has experienced recently.

George opened thusly: "Welcome to 2022: the dawn of the Gardening Age. The boom you hear isn't the launch of a billionaire's ego-powered rocket or the crash of a cryptocurrency. Reverberating across the country is a revolution in American gardening."

He then shared data that probably sent *WSJ* readers looking to buy seed-company stocks (if there are any): In 2020, seed and plant sales increased more than 60%—"a first in our company's 145-year history," George wrote. But, he added, skeptics chalked it up to a one-year anomaly.

Then 2021 was a repeat of 2020, with sales up double digits over the amazing sales of 2020. He wrote, "... the volume of orders from late 2021 and feedback from gardeners indicate that 2022 will be another double-digit record-breaker, the third miracle year in a row."

A survey of more than 4,700 Burpee customers indicated that "86% [are] saying they are excited to try new plant varieties" and "92% [are] planning to spend the same amount or more on their gardens in 2022." Of course, Burpee seed customers are the hardcore of hardcore gardeners, I would assume. Still, I'll bet some of those 4,700 are not veteran seed customers.

George calls it "The Great American Garden Boom" and he rightly credits the COVID crisis with helping Americans discover "a green new world" right in their own backyards. He wrote, "Creating gardens gave stir-crazy individuals a fresh perspective, and a break from stress and close quarters. In the garden, they felt a sense of belonging and a measure of control."

More good news from Burpee, via the *WSJ*: "Gardening's appeal crosses political lines. In red and blue states, our seed and plant growth figures are practically identical over the past two years, rising 77% in both."

George concluded with this non-partisan message: "We have become a harmonious nation of gardeners. Fractiousness and conflict, begone. Goodbye, Digital Age. The Gardening Age has begun." **GP**