GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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There is Art in Growing Plants

Albert Grimm



We made it through another spring season. The rush is over, summer is waiting and it's time to relax. The last thing we want to see are the crops that just went out the door. They would only remind us of stress and problems.

Well, if this rings true I would recommend some green-thumb garden passion to blow away the greenhouse blues. We tend to forget that it was passion for plants that got us started in this business. I'm convinced that deep inside every good grower lives an artist with passion for the beauty that we can create. Yes, we certainly need business savvy and solid knowledge about the science of growing, but if we're missing the artisan piece, we're also missing the point of success in growing plants.

Pictured: Two comparison photos of the same planters taken at the beginning and end of the garden season. Every year, I take these types of photos of the plants that I want to follow through the garden year.

Creating a piece of floral art takes much more than skill and know-how. It takes passion for growing. It takes passion that we pass into the minds and hearts of consumers when they take our creations into their home. Our customers aren't really buying plants—they're buying the expectation of lasting enjoyment of beauty and pleasure. Consequently, we're not just selling plants—we're selling a hedonistic lifestyle. It makes good business sense if we allow ourselves to enjoy the same pleasures that we create for our customers because it nurtures the passion that helps us create small masterpieces.

Think about it: How do we know whether a plant is of good quality or not? How do we know what makes a particular hanging basket beautiful? We instinctively know it when we see beauty and quality, but it's nearly impossible to describe exactly what makes a particular plant more appealing than others. Try to write down a plain definition of quality in our products. Save for the obvious crop failure candidates, it's exceedingly difficult. We may end up setting some technical parameters, but we cannot truly capture the essence of excellence. It requires an artist's perception of floral beauty and this is something we share with other forms of art. Masterpieces in painting and music don't set

themselves apart from commercial products in discount bins by their craftsmanship or technical perfection, but by their ability to get into our heads and touch our senses.

I would be curious about how many of you will take home some of the plants from your own production. Not the usual cherry-picked display pieces, but just random plants taken straight from shipping racks. Doing so emulates the experience we create for the consumer. By immersing ourselves into the garden or patio lifestyle that we create for a living, we can put our crops through the most rigorous quality test available. Customer satisfaction is the only meaningful quality standard for our products and sustained enjoyability the only meaningful metric.

My old boss and mentor used to tell me: “There’s no AVERAGE quality in ornamental plants. Each of our customers takes home a single plant and looks at it for weeks or months on the kitchen table, on the patio or in the garden. If the one poinsettia or geranium that they’d just bought for a lot of money doesn’t give them any enjoyment, they won’t come back and buy another one. Every single plant counts because every consumer who has a bad experience might be a consumer lost to our industry.”

So, if our average plants make us happy in our own garden, there’s a chance that each of them will give equal pleasure to a consumer. If we can muster the passion necessary to create garden happiness that’s fit for ourselves, our customers will come back and buy more of our lifestyle experience because that’s what our business is really all about. **GT**

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