

# GROWERTALKS

## Features

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## What We Can Learn from Proven Winners' Customers (Part 2)

*Chris Beytes*

Proven Winners has spent years building an online presence and a large database of garden consumers, so they have the means to ask. And they did—this summer—with their 2024 Proven Winners Consumer Data Report.

In it, they asked some basic questions about where respondents bought their Proven Winners plants; whether they chose annuals, perennials or something else; and what factors influenced their purchase decisions. They also asked about challenges faced when gardening, from weather to mobility issues and more. Most interestingly, they broke it down by age groups, from 24 and under to 65 and over.



Last month, we took a close look at where the survey respondents shopped and what they bought. This time, we find out where they do their gardening and what challenges they say they face. (Spoiler alert: The under-24s and 65-and-over gardeners share a common challenge.)

Here's the data, with analysis by me and Kevin Hurd, Proven Winners' VP of Product Development.

First, I immediately noted that the choice "Landscape/in-ground" had to be driven by trees, shrubs and perennials, right? At least based on my Spring River Ridge Report, in which very few of my neighbors (just 13% this year) plant annuals in the ground. Kevin agreed—it's not annuals driving that number; it's trees, shrubs and perennials.

Then what about young people and hanging baskets at 42%? That can't be driven by annuals, either, as they don't have their own homes.

"I think that goes to the trend of planting houseplants in hanging baskets—pothos and all the macrame and everything," Kevin answered. "And then as [hanging basket] use increases at 35 to 44 and keeps increasing through 55 to 64, that's buying your [annual] hanging basket and putting it on your front porch."

And, of course, young people and indoor gardening at 65%—double to triple every other age category—is driven by houseplant consumption. Are we getting the message that this (and vegetables, as Kevin pointed out last time) are the gateway crops for young people to discover our products?

	24 and under	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
<b>Where did you grow plants this year? (Select all that apply.)</b>							
Landscape/in-ground	69	89	91	91	89	87	<b>88</b>
Containers	88	82	81	85	84	80	<b>81</b>
Hanging baskets	42	39	43	44	46	44	<b>44</b>
Indoors	65	24	29	24	20	16	<b>19</b>
Other	4	2	4	4	5	5	<b>5</b>

Why did you choose Proven Winners plants?

Received 6,017 responses. Most common, based on a word cloud, were:

- Plants looked good in the store
- Plants grow well and get big
- Have had good experiences in the past
- Saw the plants on Garden Answer
- Dependable and reliable
- Liked the colors
- Unique and new
- Store availability

I was curious: Did Proven Winners hope more people would answer “recognized the brand or the pot”? I asked Kevin.

“That’s what I would have guessed would have been one of the top reasons,” he agreed.

“I also didn’t focus on ‘Plants look good in the store’ because there are other genetics that can sometimes look a little bit better on the retail shelf because that’s what they’re bred for,” he added. “But when you get down to ‘Plants grow well and get big’ and ‘Dependable and reliable,’ that’s what we focus on at Proven Winners.”

Which made me realize that folks had acknowledge of the brand, just not in so many words. As they also did when they answered, “Have had good experiences in the past.”

“We’re looking for that consumer success,” said Kevin. “We’re known for selecting larger, more vigorous plants—particularly our annuals.”

Looking at the Total column above, you see that Weather (56%) slightly beat out Pests (54%) as the number one gardening challenge for respondents, followed by “Finding the plants I want.”

But look at the breakdown by age and you’ll see that Cost (65%) is the number one challenge for the youngest group of respondents, followed by Pests and Weather (tied), then Soil quality.

“Weather and pests and the other things seem to be fairly uniform across the age groups,” said Kevin. “But the one thing that I made note of is Cost being the biggest challenge for the 24 and under group, which makes sense because they may just be getting in the workforce. You know, their disposable income isn’t that high. But that tapers off quickly once you move into the 25 to 34 age group.”

Soil quality, however, at number four overall seems an odd challenge. Is it the soil quality of their home garden? Or the soil quality of the plants they purchase? In the case of the 24 and unders, I might guess we’re talking

houseplants again. And any perusal of online houseplant groups will reveal much discussion about soil, including the feeling that commercial soil is bad and so you must mix your own using ingredients that sound like they belong in a witch's cauldron. No wonder young gardeners are challenged! So I'd suggest along with marketing your houseplants to them, talk pests and soils next.

"And then there's the mobility issue," Kevin noted, calling out a point I'd missed: mobility scored higher for those 65-plus and for those 24 and under. Why so? Kevin thinks it has to do with lack of transportation or a vehicle to get to the places selling plants.

And here I was thinking mobility meant the agility to work in the garden comfortably. Maybe it was answered both ways, depending on age.

Another challenge to note: Time. You can see it peak in the key young family and new career years of 35 to 44. Perhaps that's another opportunity to customize your sales to a particular group.

Lack of knowledge scored very evenly across all age groups, dropping only slightly with older folks. Whether they're getting their information from TikTok or the local garden club, nobody seems overly challenged by getting their questions answered.

Lastly, I noted one more interesting tidbit: On the challenge "Finding the plants I want," the youngest gardeners group is only half as challenged as their older counterparts, scoring just 19% compared to nearly double (33% to 37%) for older gardeners. I suggested two possible explanations to Kevin: Either they don't know what plants they want when they go shopping, so it's not a challenge, or they can find what they want online more readily than older gardeners.

"That would be my guess," Kevin speculated of my second option. "They're able to just go online. Basically, if you think about it, generationally, online shopping in general becomes more and more prevalent. Just going online and finding what you want is usually the easiest way."

I asked Kevin to sum up how Proven Winners might use what they've learned from this survey. He had a few thoughts. First, with weather the number one challenge, continuing to select for durable plants—the reason Proven Winners trials in various climates, including South Florida. (If something can survive a hot, humid, rainy summer in Miami, it can survive in Minneapolis). Add to that selecting introductions that show better resistance or less susceptibility to pest and diseases. And their line of branded soils, fertilizers and self-watering containers helps address those particular challenges.

Kevin sums up by encouraging growers and retailers to reach out to Proven Winners for ideas about which of their varieties to grow to meet the needs of this broad range of consumers.

"We still want to push for garden centers and wholesale growers to continue to rotate their plant selections because consumers are looking for those new items." **GT**

	24 and under	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
<b>What challenges do you face when gardening and growing plants?</b>							
Weather	54	54	53	47	53	60	<b>56</b>
Pests	54	48	53	54	55	54	<b>54</b>
Finding the plants I want	19	36	34	35	37	33	<b>35</b>
Soil quality	38	34	35	32	31	32	<b>32</b>
Cost	65	43	41	35	31	28	<b>31</b>
Light requirements	42	28	29	26	25	28	<b>27</b>
Water requirements	23	18	24	22	25	28	<b>26</b>
Space	23	29	27	26	23	24	<b>24</b>
Diseases	27	26	24	25	21	20	<b>21</b>
Lack of time	15	20	25	19	16	10	<b>14</b>
Mobility issues	12	4	4	7	9	17	<b>12</b>
Lack of knowledge	12	13	13	11	10	8	<b>10</b>
Other	0	5	4	8	9	10	<b>9</b>