

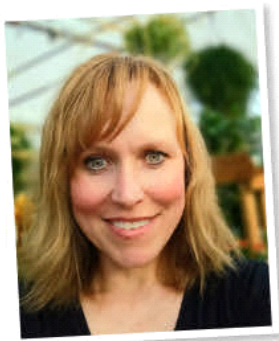
GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

11/28/2025

Knowing Where We've Been

Trudy Watt



TRUDY WATT

Last week, my colleagues and I had an amusing conversation about some of the greenhouse practices and products that used to be so common (think: mid to late '90s). It was one of those conversations that made me cringe as I realized we were at the point in our lives that we were starting to use the phrase, "Remember when ...?"

We laughed as we remembered when 8-in. annual hanging baskets were part of production and 10-in. hangers seemed a very impressive offering. What a sight the greenhouse was with all of our shiny white hanging basket pots! We recalled transplanting and stocking thousands of 1206 bedding plants at a robust \$1.99 price point. And don't forget about the mid-spring, 99-cent 1204 pansy special. The

recollection of the impressive array of picotee, striped and star-patterned bedding petunias we grew was remembered as a source of pride. We assiduously filled our benches (cinder blocks and pallets, of course) with the finest varieties of wax begonias, seed geraniums and marigolds.

Every home gardener that wished to create the same meticulously planned city hall flowerbeds for themselves visited us with the hopes that we could help them put together an equivalent ordered look. Rows of red seed geraniums and marigolds bordered with annual alyssum was the gold standard of flowerbeds in our community. Planters were more of an afterthought. (Please tell me someone else remembers white plastic urns!)

Our production staff have become incredibly attuned to the needs and requests of today's customers and we collaborate on providing solutions that will keep our customers inspired and eager to keep growing. Rather than planning tidy flower gardens, we're helping gardeners overcome more affecting issues such as drought and heat tolerance, and growing their own food.

The desire to support pollinators is ubiquitous and we have so many options to meet that particular request. What did we do before Hummingbird's Lunch Cupheas and Bee Alive Bidens? How did we manage without the impressive array of heat-loving and durable annual salvias? Thanks to the efforts of plant breeders, we have so many incredible plants to recommend.

Water conservation concerns have prompted us to rapidly expand our selection of heat- and drought-tolerant annuals to include more selections of portulaca, gazania and lantanas. Vincas have caught our eye as a good

recommendation for low water use. The heat-loving annuals? They were removed from our crop selections for awhile due to wet, cold summers and now have become marketable choices again. Funny how things circle back.

The biggest increase in sales this past spring were our vegetable plants, as high produce prices and economic uncertainty prompted people to try and grow at least some of their food. Ready-to-go mixed vegetable planters with tabletop sizes of peppers and tomatoes were hot sellers. Although there's plenty of interest in growing, many people just don't have the time or skill set, so we just meet them where they are. The 1206 tomato packs are long gone and we now concentrate on more patio-ready selections.

Home growers are seemingly not as focused on huge harvests as much as taking home exceptionally flavorful, curated varieties of their favorite veggies. Although still great sellers, traditional herbs (chives and parsley) have taken a back seat to more gastronomically interesting flavors due to social media influences. Customers now come in asking for complementing herbs to recreate trendy cocktails and Mojito Mint is now our top-selling herb! A different take on using gardening to relax, I suppose.

I wonder, in the coming years, if we'll see dramatic plant introductions as exciting as when Purple Wave Petunias were first released? Firefly Petunias may not be everyone's choice, but they sure have created a lot of buzz. Will we see another COVID-era houseplant craze that had us locking up plants and watching customers reselling tropicals from our parking lot?

I'm unsure of what the future holds, but I know that we'll embrace it, look back and remember something that makes us roll our eyes. One of the secrets to success in this industry, I believe, is the willingness to review, revise and adapt. Now we're using that last box of 1206 cell packs for in-store kids planting activities with the hope that this might kindle a spark of interest in horticulture, in whatever form, in the next generation. **GT**

Trudy Watt has a Bachelor's of Horticulture and is a Canadian Accredited Floral Designer. She's worked as an educator, a grower and in retail horticulture for over 30 years. She's most at home in a garden center, connecting people with plants.