

an inside look

In June I visited Seattle, Washington, for the Garden Centers of America (GCA) summer tour and ended up taking a tour of a different kind as well. I went to the Boeing factory up in Everett, Washington, where 747s, 767s, 777s and 787 Dreamliners are made.

A tour departs every half hour throughout the day and lasts 90 minutes; and ours included 100 people. I'm no mathematician, but that is a lot of tour-goers.

These aren't all pilots, engineers or airplane nerds. Some were tourists like myself, others were people who have lived in the neighborhood for years but hadn't taken the tour and still others were students on a field trip.

Everyone on the tour wanted an inside look at something that likely plays a role in their lives: airplanes. When I got to the airport for my flight home, I felt like I knew just a little bit more as I looked out the window trying to determine which plane was which. Unfortunately, or fortunately, my flight home was on an Airbus, so I couldn't impart any unwanted Boeing trivia on my seatmate.

What does this have to do with plants? I remember almost six years ago on my first trip with Lawn & Garden Retailer feeling empowered after returning home. I could look at a container in front of someone's house and name at least a few of the annuals in it. When my family was having a debate over some plant in a flowerbed, I maybe could've helped solve the argument. How things have changed for me since then!

I think there's so much value in giving people the knowledge they need to get excited about something that is all around them, but they had never thought twice about — like airplanes, or flowers.

the power of a tour

On the GCA Summer Tour, we visited Molbak's Garden + Home in Woodinville, Washington. The store has 135,000 square feet of total retail space, and everywhere you looked, there was something unique to see.

At the entrance to the store, I noticed a map like many of you might do at your garden centers, but it was a sign (inset) on a major walkway that really caught my attention.

Molbak's offers three store tours on Saturdays and two tours on Sundays. That's five opportunities a week for customers to learn about what you do with no pressure for them of having to possess any gardening knowledge.

You can show them every area of the store, talk about what they should be doing in their gardens now, mention any specials or upcoming events, and, most importantly, answer every question they're not afraid to ask in a small group.

While also on the GCA Tour, we visited Windmill Gardens in Sumner, Washington, which started producing hydroponic lettuce approximately 18 months ago.

The head grower made an announcement that he'd be showing 30 people around the operation.

The interest, however, was so high that he had to give multiple 20-minute tours to give everyone a chance at seeing the facility and asking questions.

People love an inside scoop of how things work. It's up to you to figure out how to provide this for your customers.



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