

# Georgia Peaches

The Georgia Peach Truck has been rolling into garden centers along the East Coast all the way from Atlanta to Boston since 2016. Lawn & Garden Retailer spoke with owner Brandon Smith about how it's taken off and why it works for retailers.

By Abby Kleckler



## HOW DID THE GEORGIA PEACH TRUCK COME ABOUT?

**Smith:** It evolved from a local farmers market program around Atlanta, where I managed 20 or 30 locations, working with a variety of farms to do their staffing and logistics. One of the large peach growers down in Georgia told me about a citrus truck up in the Midwest that had started years ago taking citrus up into the Midwest during the winter and had some success with it, so they started thinking about how they could do this during other times of the year, and they started doing it in the summer with peaches. I was looking at the map of where he was doing this and where other folks were doing it, and there was nobody doing this along the East Coast, which is one of the most densely populated areas of the U.S. I literally drove to Richmond, Virginia, in the spring of 2016, and I started getting on Google, Facebook and Instagram and seeing what garden centers had stronger social media presences and that sort of thing, and I prioritized them that way.

## WHY GO TO GARDEN CENTERS?

**Smith:** At the growers' meetings in the peach industry, we get a lot of consumer research about who buys peaches, and it scans heavily female, heavily suburban and somewhat affluent, and that mirrors the customer base of garden centers. Also, garden centers have the slowest time of year in the middle of summer, so I sort of discovered by accident that it was an easy sale to offer to park a peach truck and draw 100 or 200 of the customers that you see in the spring, and we'll get them back through the store in the middle of summer when you have an empty parking lot. I was really terrified about the whole prospect. I was cold calling people who had never heard of this concept of a peach truck. I thought I'd be lucky if one out of 10 welcomed us to visit during the summer and, remarkably, it was more like nine out of 10 wanted us there.



## WHAT'S NEXT?

**Smith:** The peaches really sell themselves. They're world-class Georgia peaches from one of the oldest peach farms in Georgia, Dickey Farms, that's more than 100 years old with a great history and origin story. Just about everywhere we go, the first time there's like 25 or 50 people there, and then we go back and that turns into 100 people and that 100 turns into 150 or 200. We experienced explosive growth in 2018. We used to be high-fiving and back-slapping in the back of the truck when we pulled out of a place selling 25 or 30 boxes of peaches, and now it's normal to be selling a pallet or two everywhere. A slow stop is a pallet, which is like 2,000 pounds of peaches, and then we have locations that are pushing 6 or 8,000 pounds at a time. [In December], we're also heading to the first stop on the satsuma mandarin orange and pecan schedule where we'll head down the East Coast for about three weeks. This is the first time we're doing the holidays. Georgia has a very new but rapidly growing citrus market in South Georgia. 🍑

## HOW DOES IT WORK FOR THE RETAILERS?

**Smith:** We don't charge them anything; we don't sell them anything. All we ask is their permission to park in their parking lot, and for us and them to promote it as a special event. We carry workers comp and general liability insurance for our own business and are properly insured as an LLC in the state of Georgia. The selling point to the host location is that it's a free special event that we can promote together to drive the customer counts higher. One good example was Primex [Garden Center in Pennsylvania] that last summer distributed a coupon in conjunction with our visit for their 75th anniversary promotions. I always work the line answering questions and giving people details about what they're getting into, so the line will keep moving at the point of sale. Here, as I was working the line, I gave the Primex coupon to every single person in line. We're there solely at the discretion of the garden center, so it's very, very important to me that we tailor the event to what they want and it doesn't become a burden. I want them to look at it as a big promotion and not an inconvenience. I hear from the store managers, employees or owners that their customers start asking the store about when we're coming back.

