

Yours to Use

Did you know that the National Garden Bureau's "Year of" program can provide you with easy-to-use (and free) tools to drive awareness, foot traffic and sales?

By Tim Hodson

Ask any garden center owner if they would like to sell more plants, and I'm pretty sure they will all answer "yes!" Ask them if they would like to sell more plants and have many different free, labor-saving tools at their disposal to help them do so, and the answer you might get is, "How?"

The answer to that question is the National Garden Bureau. National Garden Bureau (NGB) is a non-profit organization whose slogan is to "Inspire. Connect. Grow." The organization exists to educate, inspire and motivate people to increase the use of plants in homes, gardens and workplaces by being the marketing arm of the gardening industry.

Almost 40 years ago, NGB created its "Year of" program to help our industry promote different product categories and educate the home gardener.

Every year, the NGB's board of directors identifies four different crops (an annual, perennial, bulb and vegetable/edible) specifically for the North American market that are easy for consumers to grow, genetically diverse and readily available in the commercial market with a wide selection of varieties.

The four crops are announced to the industry in July of the previous year then promoted at different trade shows and conferences to get the industry prepared for next year. By November, photos of numerous varieties from NGB members are available for download from www.ngb.org.

For 2019, NGB has selected snapdragon, *Salvia nemorosa*, dahlia and pumpkin for the "Year of" program (see sidebar).

The program generates tremendous publicity for the four plant classes by reaching the NGB social media community that has more than 70,000 followers. The information is also available to more than 2,000 garden communicators who help spread the word through local and national print articles, blogs, podcasts and additional social media outlets.

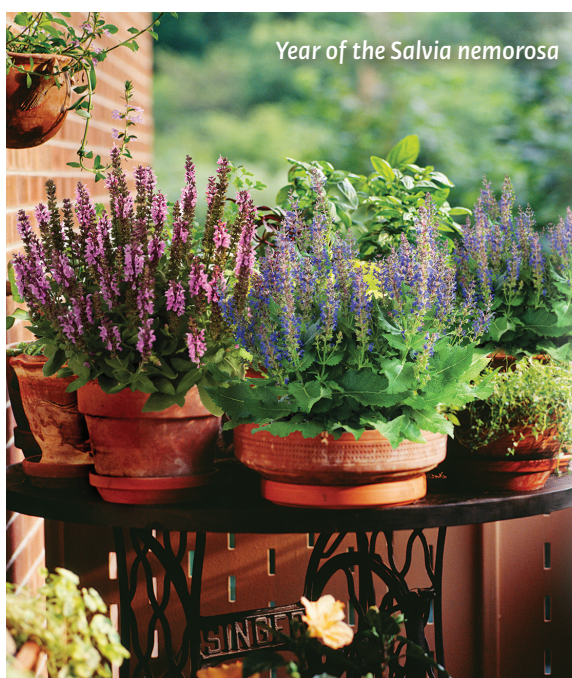
Anyone in the horticulture industry (retailers, growers, breeders, brokers, etc.) can participate in the program. For garden centers, it is an easy, at-your-fingertips resource that can help inspire consumer interest and increase sales.



Year of the Dahlia



Year of the Snapdragon



Year of the Salvia nemorosa



Year of the Pumpkin

2019 is the Year of the ...

Now that 2019 is here, National Garden Bureau's (NGB) "Year of" selections are ready for you — are you ready for them?

Here are the crops selected for this year:

For annuals, 2019 is the Year of the Snapdragon (#yearofthesnapdragon).

For edibles, 2019 is the Year of the Pumpkin (#yearofthepumpkin).

For perennials, 2019 is the Year of the Salvia nemorosa (#yearofthesalvia).

For the bulb crop, 2019 is the Year of the Dahlia (#yearofthedahlia).

These four plant classes were announced last summer and then featured in a special display at Cultivate'18 in Columbus, Ohio, as well as at other industry events in the summer and fall.

According to NGB, snapdragon was selected because it is "a nostalgic plant that has been updated for today's garden."

In the vegetables/edibles category, pumpkin was selected because there is a wide variety of sizes, shapes and colors available, making it a very fun class to promote.

This year's perennial, *Salvia nemorosa*, is commonly known as Woodland Sage. Along with its attractive blooms, this variety is also a great food source for pollinators.

For the Year of the Dahlia, NGB is working in cooperation with the American Dahlia Society, a respected organization that helped make the NGB dahlia photo library the most extensive in "Year of" history!

NGB will be promoting each of these crops throughout the year on its Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram pages. Garden centers are encouraged to check out these pages and link to them.

In addition to NGB's social media outlets, there are many different marketing and promotional tools available on its website (www.ngb.org) to help you publicize these crops, educate your customers, drive traffic to your store and increase sales.



At Your Service

NGB has created a plethora of tools that garden retailers can use to promote these specific “Year of” crops and help drive consumers to your store.

On the NGB website (www.ngb.org), you will find such things as in-depth articles on each of the featured varieties; an expansive photo library; a downloadable PowerPoint presentation featuring the 2019 crops; printable educational flyers; 5-by-7-inch and 8-by-10-inch printable signs; Did You Know? fun facts; and water color logos for all four classes. All of these items are available and they are free. In fact, all of the images in this article were downloaded from the NGB website.

Also, 24-by-36-inch printable paper posters are downloadable or NGB can provide them for \$25 each.

NGB also works with a third-party company that can create promotional items (tote bags, coffee cups, aprons, etc.) to raise awareness of the different varieties.

Something new this year that NGB is working on is a video contest where garden centers, their customers or anyone else can submit their own videos about the “Year of” crops. Details on the video contest will be announced in the coming months, so stay tuned.

Tools to Get the Job Done

Diane Blazek, NGB’s executive director wants garden centers to know these different resources are available 24/7/365 to help increase sales and educate customers.

“We WANT garden centers to use them. Take advantage of these tools. They are super easy to use and will save you time and money,” Blazek says.

Each year NGB commissions a designer to create unique logos for each of the crops. Retailers can use these logos in any way they want — on bench signage, at in-store events, on social media posts; in print and broadcast advertising — the list of possibilities is limitless.

Blazek said any of the information on the NGB’s “Year of” page can be used by retailers. “There are no restrictions. We don’t limit the use of the information.”

Some of Blazek’s suggestions include using the information to create interest on your garden center’s Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest pages to let your customers

know about the crops, maybe creating a trivia contest as an incentive, to get people into your store. Even easier is to follow NGB on social media and share their many posts that promote these classes.

Another idea is to design dedicated displays to the “Year of” crops in your store and use unique signs containing some of the information listed on the fun fact sheets or posters. Blazek says the tip sheets or the top 10 lists are very popular with consumers in stores and on social media.

Blazek also recommends sharing the information with your local print and media outlets and then working with them to develop story ideas that help position you as an expert on the category and a destination for customers to find the products.

The logos also can be used on company uniforms, hats, signage, ads — wherever your customers’ eyes are to make them more aware of these plant classes and help you sell more of them.

“It is something that says, ‘Go to the garden center and buy those varieties,’” Blazek states.

The program is also a good way to promote the crops throughout the year — seed sales in the winter months, finished sales in the spring and summer, and perennials and bulbs in the fall.

“There are so many different ways to use the information. And many ways that we haven’t even thought of,” Blazek states. “We would love to hear from garden centers on unique ways that that they would like to use the ‘Year of’ program.”



The “Year of” logo can be used on promotional items to raise awareness of the featured varieties.

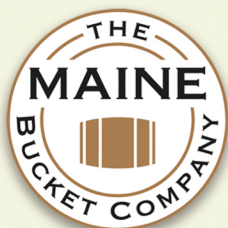
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