

Sparkling More Sales

Here are some tips to help bump your store sales — and profits — during the shoulder seasons.

By Katie Rotella

When spring fever hits, it's easy to step back and watch the products roll off your shelves. Shoppers are on a mission to color their homes and leave behind a long and dreary winter. But what is your long-term strategy to keep the enthusiasm up for more flower sales all year long? How do you plan for success during the shoulder seasons?

Over the years, I've gleaned plenty of tips from my smart and savvy colleagues. In this article, I'll share many of them with you as you strive to keep your off-seasons profitable.

Fall Is for Decorating

Leland Toering, Darwin Perennials' sales and marketing manager, likes to tell this story about his wife's honey-do list when it comes to fall décor: "Last September, I came home to find the front porch of my suburban Chicago home decorated with pumpkins, stalks of corn, a few bales of hay ... and four big, round fall-colored empty pots. My wife had started decorating for the fall season! All we needed to complete the front porch display were plants to fill up those empty pots." Leland highly suggested those pots be filled with perennials.

His colleague, the late Greg Soles, spoke often about "the color bridge." This was the concept of taking advantage of fresh color timed to arrive in shoulder seasons. Perennials are natural options for fall: They have long flowering windows and add seasonal color and texture. They survive first frosts and offer shoppers more choice beyond the traditional garden mum.

Greg's research on a garden center's shoulder season exposed nearly 24 weeks of extended sales opportunity when using fresh perennials. And he meant FRESH, not hacked back or discounted 50% off.

Your suppliers are catching on, too. Recent trialing and new perennial breeding has improved their production and scheduling knowledge. The latest perennials on the market are more "programmable," meaning growers can plan, grow and ship perennials — in flower — for more fall sales.

Mum Pals

Let's expand on this. After August, your store is probably filled with mums, cabbage and kale. But that's just the start! Garden mums have traditionally enjoyed 95% of retail shelf space in the fall. However, realistically, this class has a color window of about 25 days with little-to-no hardiness to flaunt. Compare that to a fresh, in-flower coreopsis: It has nearly a 10-week color window, comes in great fall colors, plus it's hardy to USDA Zone 5. Think about providing your customers more choice for their fall décor.

When it comes to offering shoulder-season choices for fall and early spring, Table 1 shows some "mum pal"



Cyclamen

Table 1 — Mum "Pals"	
Coreopsis	
Salvia greggii	
Salvia nemorosa	
Dianthus	
Echinacea	
Gaillardia	
Pansy	
Nemesia	
Alyssum	
Ornamental Millet	
Ornamental Pepper	
Lavender	
Achillea	



Fall Store Display



flowers you may want to consider from my friends at PanAmerican Seed. Both Darwin Perennials (www.darwinperennials.com) and PanAmerican Seed (www.panamseed.com) have online guides for flower scheduling. Be sure to check that plant list out — and tell your grower!

Vegetables and Herbs

Vegetables continue to be popular among new, novice gardeners and today’s foodie shoppers. Encourage them to garden with cool-season or indoor edibles to extend their season, or expand your assortment to include a year-long fresh herb program. The quest for fresh flavor doesn’t end with the frost, says Tiffany Heater, account manager for the Burpee plant brand. Let your customers enjoy the many benefits of growing herbs 365 days a year. The Burpee Fresh Flavors indoor herb collection was specially selected to grow indoors. The pots are sleeved with instructions and care tips to make the user successful.

**Use your laser printer to
Create Your Own
Silent Sales Force**

- * Always on duty
- * Information rich
- * Consistent
- * Professional
- * Cost effective

Labeling software
Waterproof signs, tags and labels for the nursery industry
For over 20 years

Call or click for more information:
(503) 717-9295
www.gardenware.com
info@gardenware.com

MADE IN CALIFORNIA

www.featherrock.com
(818) 882-0300
sales@featherrock.com

Sienna Artisan® Mini Planters
by featherrock®

Available in
single or double hole
100% natural pumice
Perfect for Tillandsia!

4-6" 6-8"



Mixed Combo



Herbs - Cyclamen



Herbs

Speaking of veggies, hosting events around tasting and sampling the summer harvest can further spark sales. In August, create the experience, add a little education, and entice them to buy easy-to-grow fall vegetables and herbs. Check out the Burpee plant brand support page (www.burpeehomegardensbrand.com) for podcasts, videos, bench signage and more ready-to-use promotional materials to download for your store.

Gifts To-Go

Make sure your community knows your store is a great source for hostess gifts, get-well flowers, birthday surprises and other take-and-go plants. You don't need a full florist shop to make a person smile — think beyond the bouquet! Compact potted plants like perky SunBuzz sunflower pushes out sunny blooms for many weeks, and looks great in home or office décor.

For the cool season, cyclamen flowers are the color of love, and are perfect for Sweetest Day, Valentine's Day and even Christmas holidays. And the ultimate impulse item, gerbera, are a classic choice to keep in-stock year-round. PanAmerican Seed product marketing manager Claire Josephson suggests upgrading black pots with a sleeve or decorative container, and be sure to add a gift tag. Market them as back-to-school gifts for teachers, place-cards for your next dinner party, or a quick way to say thank-you to a friend.

A New Way to Combo

In his "Thrive" newsletter, Jeff Gibson, Ball landscape and independent garden center business manager, promotes a new idea to build mixed containers to meet the needs of today's consumer. Most of them want to skip the upfront effort, yet still enjoy great results.

So, modeled after delivered-to-the-door meals like HelloFresh and Blue Apron, and personal shopping services like Stitch Fix, your store can supply customers ready-to-enjoy flower "ingredients" that make their lives simple. Imagine: New flowers sent each month to match the weather — and their busy lifestyles.

Take it further: Why not offer easy-care containers for your fellow local businesses, too? As you drive through your town, you spot empty window boxes and patio planters without even getting out of the car. Turn that into a possible seasonal plant subscription service, using the containers they already own. Your team can freshen up their hanging basket or window boxes.

WATERPROOF ~ UV PROTECTED ~ ALL WEATHER ~ OUTDOOR ART

VISIT US AT THESE SUMMER SHOWS TO SEE ALL NEW INTRODUCTIONS FOR SPRING 2020
 AmericasMart Showroom Building 2, 10-A-22 ~ IGC Show, Chicago #2002 ~ Casual Furniture Market, Chicago #7-1063



BLOOM·ables™
everything that blooms™



New for Spring 2020!

Bloomables™ is made up of our best flowering roses and woodies that are easy-to-grow for the grower and the consumer.

These varieties will not only look good at retail, they will bloom all season and offer high reward in the garden.

To order, contact your Star® Roses and Plants Territory Manager.
www.BLOOMABLES.com



BROUGHT TO YOU BY
STAR® ROSES and PLANTS

Circle 142

Merchandising



It's a win-win — they get stunning small-space accents to simply water and enjoy, and you reap the benefits of multi-season sales.

Best of the Rest

I've learned many ways to re-position plants over the years for promotion to the consumer media — ways to re-think flowers as appealing products beyond the garden wall. One of these tricks is to group your flowers into trends. You've no-doubt seen the explosion of social media and video, and how savvy influencers have turned a how-to DIY project into celebrity status. Look for "Instagrammable" plants in your assortment and let them shine!

"Plants with a purpose" goes after the shopper who is not your typical gardener. They may be accessorizing their fashion-forward décor or weekend outfits using colorful plants. They may be sharing glow-up tips for sugar scrubs and face masks using natural floral elements. They may even be foodies shirt-tailing onto fun recipe videos to show their followers how oh-so-easy living the good life can be. Fill your store in the shoulder season with edible flowers, lavender and highly scented plants, project-type blooms for pressing or drying, medicinal floral options for self-care and wellness ... find their purpose and promote it.

And finally, don't forget the other way to amplify your color portfolio when the weather turns cool: Fandom-mania! From your local high school colors to national sports teams, the fall season is literally the kick-off to a fresh way to look at garden color and show support for your regional teams. Marigolds, zinnias, ornamental peppers and other long-flowering landscape plants can help the neighborhood root, root, root for the home team. (And if they don't shop at your store, it's a shame!)

I hope some of these tips continue to inspire you and your retail team to take advantage of new plant breeding, and of all the existing resources your suppliers are ready to share. With busy season



almost over, take a moment to reflect on the last 12 months and evaluate your successes with any new programs, plants and ideas you've implemented.

Some notes you should take along the way:

- Did I have the right plants at the right time?
- What did I sell out of and what did I dump?
- Did my vendors and suppliers perform up to par?
- What other trends can I get on board with to capitalize even more next year?

The time you invest in your busy-season wrap-up is just as important as planning, so involve your team — brainstorm — and be sure to keep an open mind. That's the quickest way to have the best outcome and turn slow time into "solve" time. 🌸

Katie Rotella is the senior public relations and digital manager for Ball Horticultural Company in West Chicago, Illinois. She loves turning trends into garden solutions. Get more store resources at www.ballseed.com.