

## Focused on the Future of Gardening

As National Garden Bureau marks its 100-year anniversary, Executive Director Diane Blazek reflects on the past and discusses the nonprofit's work on behalf of the industry.

By Teresa McPherson

**N**ational Garden Bureau (NGB) Executive Director Diane Blazek wants people to know that the organization she leads is a source for not only garden centers, but for home gardeners, members of the media, social media influencers and more.

I recently had the chance to speak with Blazek about the organization's past and present — as well as predictions for the future.

**L&GR:** What is the purpose of National Garden Bureau?

**Diane Blazek:** To disseminate good gardening information to home consumers. Over the last couple of years, we've evolved to be not only educational but inspirational. We've found that some people want the education, all the scientific information, and some people just want to put pretty plants together. So, we're definitely covering both sides.

**L&GR:** How is this accomplished?

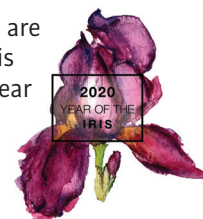
**DB:** With some of our oldest programs, which have been in place for decades. One of them is our Year Of program,

which launched in 1980. This is where we focus on a class; in 1980, we started it with one class, a vegetable. A year later, we added a second class, a flower. We've revised the naming so now we have an annual, an edible, a perennial, a bulb and flowering shrubs.

**L&GR:** How do you choose the Year Of classes?

**DB:** It used to be just a Board of Directors decision. About five years ago, we started involving our members. The Board compiles a list of possible classes, which our members then vote on. The top-ranking classes are then chosen to be Year Of classes. This process allows us to create a 3- to 5-year plan so we know what the featured classes will be for a few years out.

It's by class, it's not by a specific variety; we cover a crop class. We also



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We are connecting the industry to the end consumer via these garden communicators. The garden communicators who go on the trip and say it's like getting a master's degree in horticulture in one week. Their knowledge then will be disseminated to their readers and followers.

It's been amazing to make connections with those garden writers, for them to make connections with the industry and for NGB to act as the conduit. What happens all the time now is people will call or email and say, 'I need an expert on tulips — who do you have?,' or similar types of requests. That connection is where I think we play an important role that I sometimes describe as a funnel. You've got this big industry, but on the other side, you've got all of these home gardeners — and the funnel is National Garden Bureau and the people we help do their jobs or the people we funnel information through.

**L&GR:** What might garden centers not know that NGB does?

**DB:** I'm not sure they know that everything we do can be used and repurposed. We do it for their benefit and to save them time. We want them to use our fact sheets, we are an image source, we create PowerPoints they can use, they can share our social media posts, they can use our newsletter content.

**L&GR:** Where will NGB be in another 100 years?

**DB:** Our vision is to be the marketing arm of the horticulture industry because we want to promote horticulture. We want to increase consumption of horticulture. We're doing a lot to that end now, but the specifics on how this will be done? We have to adapt, and part of that will be looking at results of survey on the future of gardening of nearly 2,000 consumers that we conducted last fall.

In the survey, we asked questions like what can we as an industry do to make it more enticing for you to buy more plants? Or, what garden chores do you wish you didn't have to do, because maybe we could breed plants that would prevent having to do that. We have a few leading questions in the survey, but we leave an "other" category for write-ins.

Our goal is to take the consumer survey results and present them to the industry. Nobody else has done this, meaning taking a look at where the industry is going to be in 50 or 100 years.

We are here to represent, support and promote the industry. We will continue to adapt and change and push out information to benefit the industry. We don't just focus on one segment — we will promote bedding plants, patio plants, seed starting, vegetables and edibles, indoor plants, landscaping, shrubs, therapeutic gardening, etc. — we try to cover as much as we can with the resources we have.

For more information, visit [www.ngb.org](http://www.ngb.org).

