



The Pandemic Gardening Boom Is Just the Beginning...

Garden centers with a growth mindset can bring this new crop of consumers the products, information, and services they need to be successful “plant people.”

By Scott Rusch

It's no secret — plants are “in.” Plants are [finally] getting a portion of the spotlight they deserve in a world where screens and plastic dominate life. The disruption of the collective everyday routine gave consumers the time to reflect on what they want from life.

Healthy bodies and minds are now the focus. People pursue physical health through exercise, cooking at home and medicine; mental health through caring for themselves, others, pets and plants. Gardening, fresh cut flowers and indoor plant parenthood provide the physical and mental health benefits consumers not only want, but crave.

I believe we are at the beginning of a renaissance where consumers turn to plants and nature, not the end of the boom. We can collaborate with a growth mindset and deliver this new cohort of consumers the products, information, and services they need to be successful in their quest to become plant people.

Insights from Inside the House?

Foliage plants and fresh cut flowers sales are booming. The houseplant/ foliage plant market really started taking off in 2017 ... then lockdowns started and that surge turned into a

full-blown tidal wave for the indoor plant category. U.S. houseplant sales are now approaching \$2 billion by some estimates. Cut flower retail purchases increased 15 to 20% in 2021, over the good growth in 2020 where consumers bought more for personal use. Outdoor flower and vegetable gardening saw massive growth as well.

It likely started with the impulse, feel-good factor. Many people needed that pick-me-up in the last year or two. They realized the plants and flowers they bought to sit beside them during online meetings and kitchen tables added more to their life. So, they kept buying more. A good problem to have!



Plant care (read: the fear of killing their plants) drove consumers to form communities online. There are now hundreds of plant communities that are platforms to search for novelty and crowdsourced supply. I belong to a few groups, as I'm sure many of you do. Nine groups altogether connect me to about 328,000 members for advice and buying/selling/trading: begonias, sansevieria, philodendron, anthurium and many, many more plant categories.

Are these groups filling a need that the industry cannot? Consumers who are hunting for new and different, how might we identify those opportunities and scale up faster to meet demand? How might we support their needs for growing advice? How might we make

it easier for them? New brands and online sellers are paving the way, but all parts of the industry can support this effort in a collaborative way to bring innovation, reliable supply and information; not just on foliage and cut flowers, but also potted floral, annuals, perennial, vegetables, etc.

Collaborate, Innovate and Exceed

I've seen the most effective collaborations while fostering a "growth mindset" culture in product and business development. This mindset celebrates trying new things; celebrates the success of others and what we can learn from them; celebrates equally what is learned from failure and immediately

puts those learnings into version 2.0. A growth mindset realizes challenges and constraints help us grow as we learn to innovate around them. It recognizes that our abilities, attitudes and efforts determine the outcome. A growth mindset disrupts the established thinking to satisfy the market needs while rendering the current rules obsolete.

It is hard to establish and maintain that culture in a team or organization. It starts as you hire and develop your team. One of my favorite phrases from a candidate in an interview was, "I'm looking for a job that is 50% screen and 50% green!" She had great logistics and project management skills, but little direct experience with our product lines. She jumped to the

front of the pack because she fit the culture we were after. Her new ideas fused with the ideas of the rest of the team — and that was a powerful catalyst to move projects forward. She learned the products and processes quickly because she had the passion.

Passion drives employees to succeed in their role and for their team. The passion you bring to work every day gives them the fuel to keep it going. Teams feed off your example; as leaders in the industry, remember that your attitude and energy directly impact the teams.

I had the opportunity to hear Duncan Wardle open this year's TPIE. His goal was to energize and give us the tools to get in the right frame of mind to have conversations about new opportunities. He hit it out of the park! I can't recall another speaker that got an audience as engaged. He didn't talk about plants, the industry, trends or typical things you may think of at an opening session. He saw beyond the surface and knew that, for us to benefit, we needed to

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have a little fun and be reminded how to foster new ideas to fruition.

When people have fun, they get into the right frame of mind to think creatively. When they have time to think, they take the spark of creativity and build it into an idea. The ideas they share and collaborate on with their colleagues develop into innovations. Those innovations need your leadership, direction and bravery to become reality — and that reality is what our customers want from us.

We have several upcoming industry events where new products, ideas, services and more will be discussed: CAST, European Flower Trials, Cultivate,

and many more. I encourage you to approach each with a growth mindset. Have fun, build off the ideas you see and hear, collaborate with your suppliers, customers, and yes ... competitors too.

We have an opportunity to dramatically impact people's lives with our products and services. This plant renaissance is on the horizon. Let's not be afraid to fail ... let's be brave and make it happen, together. 🌱

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