

THE TIME IS UPON US



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My friends outside of the industry make jokes about how “difficult” the floriculture industry must be. Part of their argument is that we spend our days surrounded by beautiful plants; I guess they think we just stand around and enjoy the scenery. The real problem, though, is the misplaced perception that being on an annual cycle (though I try to tell them that’s not really true) is easy.

I hear it all the time: “You must have so much down time.” Are you speaking English, I ask them, because in my industry there are no such words as down time. “What do you do in the off-season,” they continue, “when there aren’t any customers?” I’m not sure what they mean by off-season, but when there aren’t any customers, I worry. And the best line I’ve ever heard: “I wish I only worked part of the year.” So do I.

I can’t seem to make my friends understand how difficult it is to sell plants — the long hours, the high expectations, the short turn-arounds. The general public continues to see gardening as a springtime activity. You can see this in any garden center and any front yard across America. Spring is the busiest time in our industry, but it’s not the only one. Yet the general public doesn’t see the other peaks we have created — fall, summer, Christmas (see page 6 for a review of the 2002 Christmas season) — and they don’t realize that these additional peaks have made the time between springs unbearably short.

BLOW YOUR OWN HORN

Yes. There is definitely the perception that ours is a slow-paced, relaxing profession. Customers don’t know that you attend two gift shows and three conventions annually; they don’t realize that you study industries as varied as home furnishings, entomology and business management; customers fail to recognize that changing a store from summer to fall can last weeks (take a look at the green goods article on page 32 for some suggestions on merchandising perennials); and they don’t realize that the red petunias they bought this year are not the same variety they bought last year.

So what can you do? Have you ever thought about telling them? Include a story in your newsletter about the great items you found at the gift show and when they will be available in your store. Include lots of pictures, and encourage pre-orders. You can even send a targeted direct mail piece to the customers your database indicates would be interested in the new products. If you don’t have a newsletter, post an informational board just inside your store’s main entrance with the same information.

Want something on a small scale? Design a special sign to hang next to your petunias. Explain the improved genetics to your customers, and how you research the new plant offerings each year to provide the varieties with the best landscape performance.

There’s nothing wrong with letting your customers know the lengths you go for them. They are why you’re in business. And when they know how loyal you are to them, they’ll feel just as loyal to you.

Bridget C. White

coming next month...

Merchandising:

Effective renovations among a collection of small garden centers

Green Goods:

Offering the best — winners from AAS, AARS, PPA

Industry Views:

Making the most of your time at gift markets

Management:

Warranties, guarantees and returns: How long should you stand behind your products?

Plus...

- Attracting wildlife beyond birds
- Accenting outdoor living products in limited space
- Which chemicals to carry in a limited area

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