

CONSUMER TALK

"Consumer Talk" is a regular column appearing in each issue of Lawn & Garden Retailer that examines the issues facing today's garden center customers. Our panel of consumers will provide you with insight into their gardening and retail experiences to help you better understand today's customers' needs.

Spring Shopping List

With the gardening season just around the corner, we asked our panelists how they go about making their first gardening purchases.

Kelly, 28 Ithaca, N.Y.

"I have made a loose plan of how I want to design my garden and what I want to grow. I typically order seeds online from a few reliable websites in late March so that I can start certain crops indoors or give appropriate dormancy-breaking treatments in advance. The first item I will purchase this year, however, is going to be a tarp.

"As much as I want to go crazy and purchase every colorful, shiny garden item I come across, I need a tarp more than anything this year, specifically for preparing the beds. Every year, I churn my garden soil with compost from last year's garden and from my kitchen. This year, I cannot safely do that because of the perennials I planted last year. I need a tarp so that I can move the soil out of the bed, mix it on patio, then heave it back into the garden space without disturbing the perennials."



Paquita, 55 Redlands, Calif.

"We have had a couple of warm and balmy days here, and I decided to do a survey of my gardening tools. So the first things on my shopping list will be a new lopper and spade.

"I am also going to buy a hydrangea bush to plant here in the dry, old Southern California inland valley. A friend of mine in town has a huge, gorgeous bush, and I intend to copy the orientation to the sun and soil compositions of hers exactly. So I will be shopping soon!"



Jeanette, 52 Berwyn, Ill.

"That first day of sunshine without a bitter cold bite makes it feel like spring is around the corner. The stores start to show potting mixes, garden equipment and outside furniture.

"My first purchase is usually something fun. I enjoy window shopping and looking at the new whimsical garden figures and decorations. Buying something just for the heck of it is almost like buying new school supplies at the beginning of the year! But seriously, the first purchases involve preparing the soil for the new season. I will purchase some ground amendments, fertilizer and/or peat moss and lay it on the ground even before it is thawed out. This way, some of the spring rain will start to work it into the ground.

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Gay, 61 Topeka, Kan.

"We make our first spring buying excursion around the end of March. We pick up bags of mulch because the first thing we can do is clean up beds and add a fresh layer of decorative mulch around the larger trees and shrubs.

"The first trip never ends with just supplies. We are so glad spring is here that we tend to buy bedding plants too early, but they might as well wait at my house to be planted as wait at the garden center.

"I also begin planning my pond planting at this time. I wish our local garden center carried more pond supplies and information for customers about all the many land plants that do so well in water. It seems the pond stores come and go, but I have a 20-year relationship with our local garden center."



Questions to Consider

- Do you keep mulch, fertilizer, potting mix and other landscaping supplies in stock for those customers looking to do some garden maintenance?
- Does your garden center supply pond and water garden features? If so, do you offer customers information on what types of plants are suitable for water gardens? (See page 42 for more ideas on water gardening.)
- What are some must-have items you recommend to gardeners as they prepare for the spring season that might not typically be on their list?

