

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.

While You're Away...

With the summer season approaching, many of your customers might be indulging in a much-needed getaway soon. We asked our panelists what they do to make sure their gardens are taken care of while they're on vacation.

Claudia, 61 Gainesville, Fla.

"Every time we leave home, we have to plan for the cat and the plants. The grass is on irrigation and half of the large pots have a timed drip system. If we plan to be gone a week or more, we will move plants into the shade and have a sprinkler set on a timer to handle this additional watering. More sprinklers are set up to handle any areas that might need watering, such as newly planted shrubs or trees. There are always other plants to be watered. Since we pay someone to feed our cat daily, they also have the responsibility to hand water any remaining plants."



Sonia, 24 Miami, Fla.

"South Florida summers are extremely hot and humid. My garden has full sun exposure, and temperatures often exceed 90° F during the summer months. This means my garden cannot be left unattended for long periods of time if it has been unseasonably dry. Luckily, summer also happens to be the rainy season. The daily afternoon thunderstorms allow me to go away for a few days without having to worry about my plants. However, the arrival of summer also means the beginning of hurricane season.

"I live in a condo building and have decorated my balcony with palm trees and tropical flowers. So if I will be away for more than a few days, I have to bring all of my plants inside and ask a close friend to stop by to water my plants while I am away. Bringing them inside also reduces their exposure to the extreme heat and therefore decreases the frequency that they need to be watered."



Kelly, 28 Itacha, N.Y.

"While vacations are supposed to be fun getaways for most people, for me they are typically fraught with worry. Will our neighbor remember to feed our cats? Will the indoor plants survive being wick-watered for a week? Will the outdoor garden shrivel up under the hot July sun?"

"Typically when my husband and I are on vacation, we have a pretty fail-safe system for making sure neither plants nor animals die while we are gone: we employ what I refer to as the 'who wants to be a millionaire' system. In the game show, you are given three 'lifelines.' Similarly, we ask at least three people to watch the house. The three people we typically ask are local and have at least seen a plant before and know what to do when plants are dry.

"The primary person will come in the morning and evening to water and check on the plants. This person will also make sure the animals are alive, still in the house, haven't shredded the curtains and will feed them. The first and second 'lifeline' people will stop by at staggered intervals to make sure the primary person hasn't missed anything. With at least three people coming by the house at any given time, I tend to feel much better and worry less while on vacation."



Questions to Consider

- Do you stock garden tools that can be set on a timer, such as irrigation systems?
- Does your garden center carry plants that can withstand drought and heat for extended periods of time?
- Do you provide customers with a "tip sheet," highlighting steps they can take to make sure their gardens keep flourishing while they're on vacation?