

"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.

Being Choosy

We asked our panelists to tell us how and why they choose the plants they buy. Find out what they will be taking into consideration this spring.

Amy, 26 Charlotte, N.C.

"When choosing plants, I typically look for them to be hardy above all else. I have a tendency to kill things inadvertently. Also, having a backyard is a new experience for me because in the past I purchased plants that could survive in indirect sunlight, like through my apartment window. Now that I have my own yard, I am looking forward to branching out.

"I assume that I will continue to look for plants that are low maintenance yet aesthetically pleasing. I enjoy bright colors like reds and oranges, but I also like to balance them out with leafy plants. I have recently been turned on to container gardens, so I am excited to try my hand at that this spring. I am thinking succulents might be a good starting place.

"As far as the rest of the year is concerned, I think I will stick to my African violet and bamboo plant, both of which are the hardiest plants known to man! If there are other plants available that I can't kill, I'd love to know about them."



Shannon, 37 Scarsdale, N.Y.

"Most of the time, I choose my plants by the suggestion of my garden center guy. I live in a small town, and he is kind of the expert in the area when it comes to plants. After that, I look for plants that do not attract deer or squirrels. Last year, I spent tons of time planting bulbs and squirrels came and dug them all up.

"To be completely honest, I also look for flowers that are really pretty. I have two small children, which makes it harder to do tons of gardening anyway, but they like to pick out what we plant. Sometimes they pick out a bunch of things they like and they may not all work for sun or shade together, but the kids are so excited about them and just want to plant the pretty flowers at home, so I let them. Yes, sometimes they die, but the point is they picked them out and got to take them home to take care of them themselves, and they are so proud of that. To me, that is one of the most important things about planting in my garden."



Luis, 74 Rockford, Ill.

"Although I like to look at all the plant catalogs I receive over the winter, I seldom order plants by mail anymore, with the exception of bulbs, dormant perennials and seeds. The catalogs can be good sources for information though, and I jot down the names of promising-sounding plants to look for.

"My first choice to explore is my local 'high-end' nursery. They have good quality plants and a wide selection, although somewhat expensive. They receive fresh shipments throughout the spring and always seem to have good plants available. I have been impressed lately by the improved quality and variety of plants available in the spring at home improvement garden centers and even some supermarkets. Their prices are more reasonable. One needs to select these plants early, though, before they suffer from the neglect they often receive in those locations.

"Although annuals make up the bulk of my spring purchases, I have been shifting more and more to perennials. Plants are chosen, of course, with regard to their requirements for light, moisture and soil conditions. Since deer are an increasing problem in our area, I also look for deer-resistant varieties, although I realize this is a relative term. Deer will eat anything if they are hungry, and I suspect that vendors use the term 'deer resistant' a bit too liberally."



Questions To Consider

- Where do most of your customers live (urban or rural setting, etc.)? How do you cater to their different needs?
- How do you best help customers who look to you for guidance when picking out products?
- What can you do to provide customers with more cultural information?
- How do you care for plants that remain in the store unsold for longer periods of time to make sure they stay fresh looking?
- What do you do to help those customers that have deer and other animal problems in their gardens?