

"Consumer Talk" appears in each issue of Lawn & Garden Retailer to examine 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.

# Blooms on a Budget

More than ever, consumers need truly compelling reasons to spend their discretionary dollars in the garden center. How has the shaky economy affected gardeners' purchasing decisions this year? Read on to find out.

## Maria, 52 Chicago

This year, I have focused more on my vegetable garden. I have decided that planting food is more beneficial at this particular time. I used to grow more trees, plants and flowers, but this year I purchased more vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers and green peppers. Besides saving money, I now eat organic food. And because I am spending more time at home, I pay more attention to my edible garden. I know some younger gardeners who have been unsuccessful with their new veggie gardens, and I think their mistake is not attending to these plants as often as they should. Another benefit to this is that I can share my vegetables with my family and coworkers.



## Gay, 62 Topeka, Kan.

Things are different this year for all of us. Because of the economy, we have less available money for extras. I know it is hard to think of your gardening supplies as extras! This year, I cut back on plants — I bought half as many as last year — but the price of plants around here doubled, so I spent the same. I'll let the planters be a bit slim until the warm weather fills them in naturally. I also cut back on mulch.

I bought four upside-down planters and some veggies, which will pay off later with something we can eat. I have two tomatoes, two peppers and six different herbs in the containers with additional side holes. I have beauty now and abundant harvest later on. It is money well spent.

I also cut back on pond plants. They will fill in quickly as soon as the weather warms up. I finally have a local retailer who carries a great line of pond supplies, plants and fish. They are reasonably priced, and I can buy locally instead of on the Internet.



## Claudia, 62 Gainesville, Fla.

Time, more than the economy, has limited my spending this year. I have not had much time for gardening, so I have been selective with my projects. Our summer rains have started, so it is definitely time to replace the winter/spring annuals in my combination pots. I will be looking for good color in 4- to 6-inch containers. Since I will not be buying in quantity, the quality of the plant is most important along with the quest for something a bit different. I have been eyeing a particular ceramic pot at one of our local independent nurseries to place around the pool. When I shop in the next few days, I'll most likely buy that along with my plant selections. To me, it is worth the time and money to have nice color in pots placed around the pool because we spend our outdoor time in or by the pool during the summer.



## Questions to Consider

- Attitude is everything! How do you respond when customers ask, "How's it going in the store?"
- With the recent growth in vegetable gardening, have you set up a edibles department in your garden center?
- Do you educate your customers on the advantages of buying locally grown products?
- In light of today's economic situation, what's happened to your prices? Have you cut them dramatically to keep customers shopping? Raised them to defray your costs? Done nothing?