

CONSUMER TALK

"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.

Bringing it Home

In this dead of winter, many green thumbs are getting their gardening fix indoors. We asked our panelists to share what kind of plant material they use inside their homes and how they show it off.

Claudia, 62 Gainesville, Fla.

"We have a number of large sunny windows which makes it easy to grow houseplants. I have had a tall cactus-type euphorbia for at least 25 years. When it gets too tall, I cut it back and give cuttings to friends. I keep plants way too long. Some look pretty sad, but I just can't seem to throw them away. Plants that are in the house are in decorative pots while some on the screened porch are in plastic or clay pots. In addition to the poinsettias that I used to decorate for Christmas, I also bought a cyclamen. I like the 4-inch color plants that I can tuck in and around decorative items in my home. In the fall, I use the autumn-colored mums; in spring and summer, it's the white or yellow daisy mums."



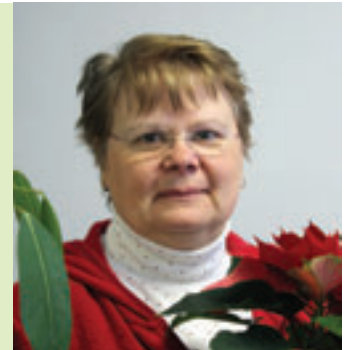
Marie, 57 Mission Hills, Kan.

"Even at the height of summer when my backyard is thick with flowers and shrubs, I always have some plants indoors. But now, in the dead of winter, indoor plants are even more important to me. I think potted plants make a room warmer and cozier. Something living and growing reminds me of the potential of spring. My favorite indoor "plant" is my AeroGarden. It was a Christmas present last year, and I think it's a fabulous addition to the house. Both years I have purchased the Gourmet Herb kit, with seed pods for seven herbs, including two kinds of basil, mint, parsley, dill, chives and, recently, thyme, in place of cilantro. The AeroGarden regulates light with a built-in grow light and keeps the seed pods watered. Seeds sprout within two weeks and herbs are available for use within about 30 days. Fresh herbs provide a tasty boost to wintertime dishes."



Jeanette, 53 Berwyn, Ill.

"I have a small home with low light, dry conditions and pets. I have chosen plants that can get by with very little care and are not poisonous. I always start them in a good potting-soil mix and then give them a little food three or four times during the spring and summer months. Their pots are usually decorative clay pots, which add to the décor of the room. My few plants are used as accents in the room. During the holidays I will pick up seasonal plants to grace the tables. Those are usually given away, meet a sorry end or will be planted outside as soon as possible. I would love to have more green and blooming plants in my home, but learning to work with my home's restrictions, although frustrating, is probably better for all things living!"



Sonia, 25 Miami, Fla.

"I have a basil plant on my kitchen counter because I love to use fresh basil in my cooking. In addition to brightening up the room, it is very fragrant and adds authenticity to my Italian-themed kitchen. It not only looks pretty in a gorgeous pot, but it is delicious too! Additionally, I enjoy having seasonal plants as decorations in my home. In February, I favor mini red roses for Valentine's Day. For Easter, I love white Easter lilies. For Christmas, I always buy a small poinsettia, as opposed to the regular plant, because it makes for a very impressive holiday centerpiece on my dining table. When I get a new plant, I often give my current plant away to a friend so they can enjoy it."



Questions to Consider

- Does your garden center offer year-round potted plants that may not require as much maintenance as outdoor plants?
- Is your staff trained on how to care for houseplants, and do they offer customers suggestions for indoor plant care?
- Do you keep a large variety of decorative pottery for customers to house their indoor plants?
- Have you taken advantage of the edible gardening trend by highlighting your herb and vegetable selections in appealing displays?