

## 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.

# [Green]washed Up?

Countless companies are now touting their commitment to sustainability and eco-friendly causes — but are consumers still buying the claims? Our panelists (and your customers) are doing their homework more than ever.

### Becky, 50 Dallas, Texas

I do feel bombarded by ads pushing organic and sustainable plants. I admit that I am skeptical about nurseries who advertise about everything "green" when one can point out the opposite. I do not buy into all their claims of being truly sustainable.

I believe the honest, committed companies are here to stay and offer a great value to those who wish for fewer chemicals in their soil and plants. Anyone who truly toils in the dirt will purchase what is best for the plants.

I don't look at this as a fad or trend, but rather an alternative.



### Gay, 62 Topeka, Kan.

We are all exposed to so much advertisement (propaganda, if you will) these days. It pops up on our home pages and e-mail, on the radio and on TV in ads and "news" stories. We get it in written word when we look at a magazine or newspaper.

If you have lived as long as I have, you know that the "green" theme is not new. We have been trying to save our planet from the ills of the Machine Age for many decades. But we are finding new ways to discover the effects of our lifestyles on the planet and many new ways to protect it. We just need to filter out the unnecessary junk and strive to find that blessed thing called *balance*.

Organic — if it truly is organic — is wonderful: better for us health-wise and better for Mother Earth. But the only way to really know whether it's organic is to grow our own, and the world we live in makes it pretty impossible for most to do that. So, what is the solution? Don't pooh-poo the need to live a clean, sustainable lifestyle, but don't fall off the edge either.

Go to your local garden center. Start a compost pile; your garden will love you. Lots of good eating can come from big pots on your deck or porch. Ditch the plastic or recycle it. Don't waste water. Eat as fresh and pure as you can grow or buy.

Don't let the media sway you. Find the path that most closely follows your philosophy, and stick to it. You'll need to tweak it a bit as new information comes to light, but strive for that perfect balance, and it will not fail you.



### Luis, 76 Rockford, Ill.

I certainly hope that the current "go green" movement is not merely a transient trend.

While one has to be cautious about the claims of green product suppliers, there is no doubt that the principles of the green movement are necessary for restoring and protecting our planet's environment. There is certainly a likelihood that some producers will attach "green" and "organic" labels to their products without justification. Suppliers who label their products as such need to be able to substantiate their claims. Consumers need to keep themselves informed and should be diligent about investigating the reliability of such labels.

Conscientious naturalists and gardeners have been at the forefront of the green movement for decades, and I am sure they will continue to do so in the future. The general public needs to do the same. In the garden, we should promote the use of natural solutions for pest and weed control, avoid chemical fertilizers, and encourage composting, harvesting rainwater, and using recycled and recyclable products.



## Questions to Consider

- When selling "eco-friendly" products in your garden center, how thoroughly do you investigate suppliers' sustainability claims?
- Do you emphasize the steps you're taking to "go green" in your garden center's advertising?
- Do you sell composting supplies? Is your staff prepared to answer customers' questions on how to use them?