



Tours, such as the Lawn & Garden Retailer/GCA Pack Trial Tour, are a great source for finding trends.

Keeping Up

Trade shows, magazines, suppliers... there are many ways to keep up on the trends. Which is most popular, and how can you step it up a notch?

By Carrie Burns

Keep up on the trends; this is hot right now; that is not; you should carry this product or that product — isn't this what you read all of the time in trade magazines and hear at trade shows? You all know it's important, and it sounds so simple, but you also know how complex it really is; more than 50 trade shows a year to travel to, more than 10 trade magazines to read that apply to the products you carry, or may carry in the future...all this can take up just about 50-75 percent of your time. And then you have to apply the trends, which can sometimes fade before the season is over. So, just

how do your peers do it? We wanted to know the answer to this as well, so we did a little legwork.

We wanted to know which trade shows are most beneficial; which magazines give you the most information on trends in the industry — we had ulterior motives for this one, but we'll keep those thoughts to ourselves so we can focus on the task at hand. We try our hardest to be the only needed source to update you on the most recent trends. But, we know you have numerous ways to find out this information. So, we devised some questions that pertain to finding trends and sent them to a select group of garden centers.

One thing to keep in mind when looking at our findings is that it is

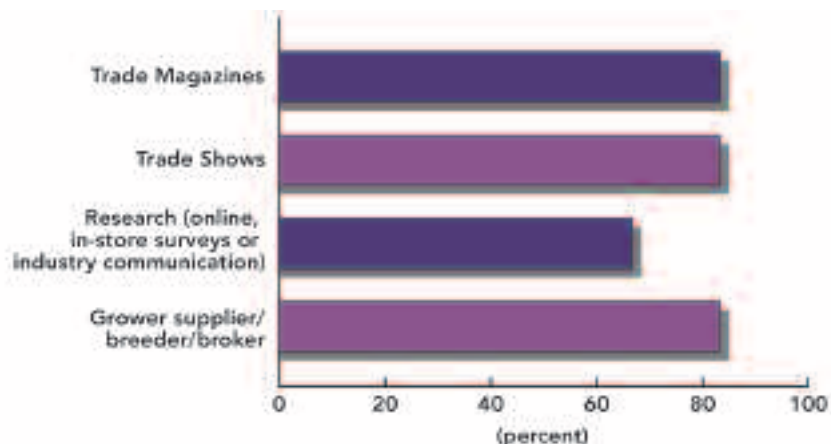


Figure 1. Where do garden centers find the latest trends in green goods?

CONSUMER TRENDS

impossible to ask every garden center in the United States and expensive to get a sample group that is regionally significant, but these results are a great way to get you thinking about what you need to do to keep up on the trends.

TRADE SHOWS

Trade shows scored top marks on the survey when people were asked where they find the latest trends in green goods, hard goods and gifts/collectibles. About 83 percent of respondents answered they find trends in green goods and hard goods at trade shows. However, it was interesting that the majority of respondents to the survey said they attend only 1-3 trade shows per year (see Figure 4, right). I take this to mean that the trade shows respondents attend are carefully chosen, knowing they will be able to identify the trends there. Some popular trade shows mentioned were New England Grows, AmericasMart-Atlanta and SNA...The World's Showcase of Horticulture.

Another interesting tidbit from the survey shows that some respondents attend consumer trade shows, which makes sense;

experience what your customers will be asking for. Some popular consumer trade shows include the Philadelphia Flower Show, Chicago Flower and Garden Show and many other regional shows you can find around your area.

Just how important are trade shows? Important enough to travel anywhere in the United States, as seen in Figure 5, right. Retailers will travel a great distance to find what they are looking for, and sometimes that distance is necessary.

Garden center tours can fall into this category. Some of the industry organizations and associations host wonderful tours of garden centers and other retail outlets. Even just one of these tours can give you a number of trends in one shot — a few to look at are American Nursery & Landscape Association, Garden Centers of America, International Garden Centre Congress and others. You can even set up your own; gather a few of your industry friends, map out a route and contact some retailers to ask if you can come visit. There's so much you could learn, even without a tour guide.

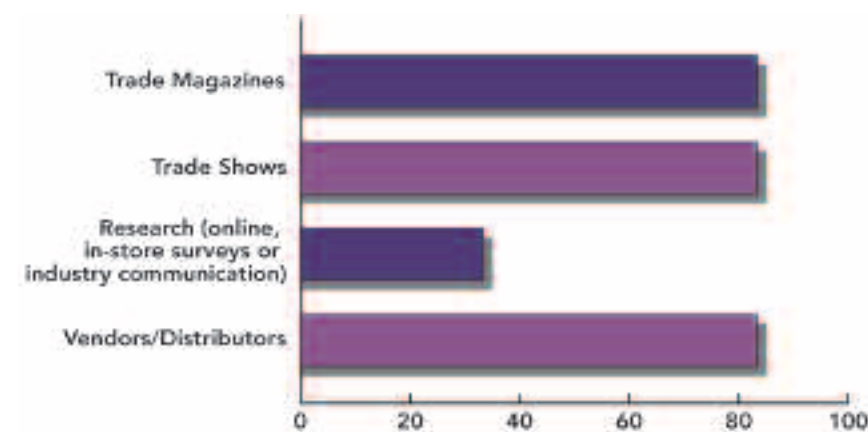


Figure 2. Where do garden centers find the latest trends in hard goods?

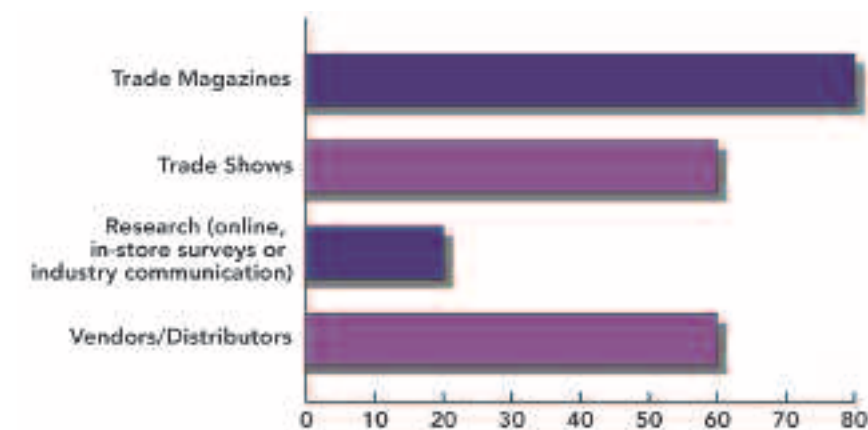


Figure 3. Where do garden centers find the latest trends in gifts/collectibles?



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Make sure to look at the calendar on page 13 to find out more about upcoming trade shows and tours.

MAGAZINES

Like trade shows, magazines are useful sources when it comes to finding trends — especially gifts/collectibles, see Figure 3, left — and it looks like our respondents spend a good amount of time reading them. More than 83 percent of respondents read three or more trade magazines each month (see Figure 8, page 52). That is a lot of reading!

The great thing about trade magazines is that there are many that focus on industries ancillary to your core business. Don't limit yourself to just the lawn and garden/retail trade magazines. Experiment with the trade magazines for birding, gourmet food, gifts/collectibles, pets and general retail. There are specific magazines for just about every type of product you carry, and those magazines are going to have a lot of information on trends within their industry, just like ours does about this industry. There is always something to learn from other industries. See "Swimming

in a Sea of Ideas," page 30, for more on this.

Another important source for finding trends is consumer magazines. I've heard so many times at seminars and just talking to retailers that customers come in and ask for something they saw in a magazine such as *Better Homes & Gardens* or even just in the gardening section of the local newspaper. Just like consumer trade shows, consumer magazines can help you prepare for what your customers are going to want, and even if they don't come in asking for it, you'll still know that what you carry is the most up-to-date or stylish product available.

VENDOR/DISTRIBUTORS

Your vendors and distributors can do more for you than just provide product — ask them for their advice or what they've seen as the "latest trends." They are at just about every trade show out there promoting their product and/or services; they read numerous magazines; and they are at more garden centers every year than the rest of us will see in a lifetime, so

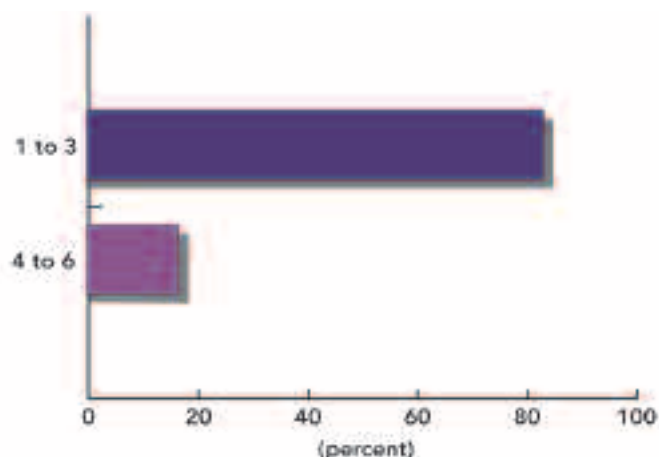


Figure 4. How many trade shows do respondents attend a year?

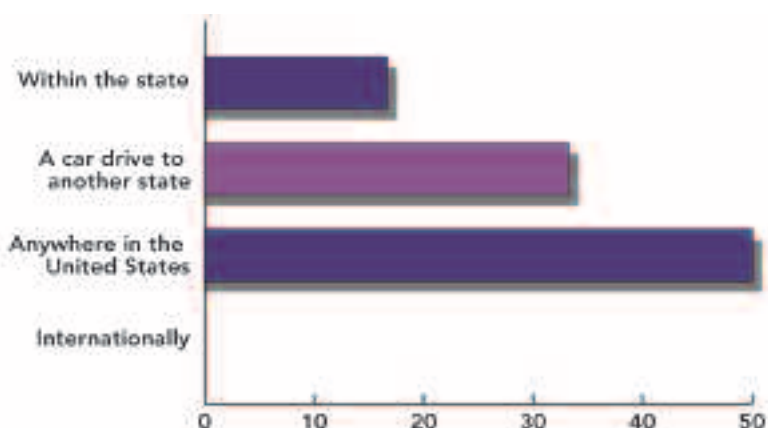


Figure 5. What is the greatest distance respondents will (or have to) travel to attend a trade show?

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Don't forget to visit the trade shows to see the most up-to-date trends. (Photo courtesy of OFA)

they are exposed to trends. ♦

The majority of your vendors and distributors would love to provide you with information to better your business; that way, you'll spend more with them!

SELF-SUFFICIENT RESEARCH

Sometimes you can only trust yourself to do the job, especially when it comes to making important buying decisions. And, there are many ways to do the research

on your own.

Internet. The Internet has become one of the most useful research tools for a number of things. I don't know what I would do without it. I don't really need to tell you much about it, as you most likely know how to utilize the Internet. But, it may be of interest to go into some gardening or home décor message boards to see what consumers are saying. There are even region-specific boards, so you can get a better grip on trends in

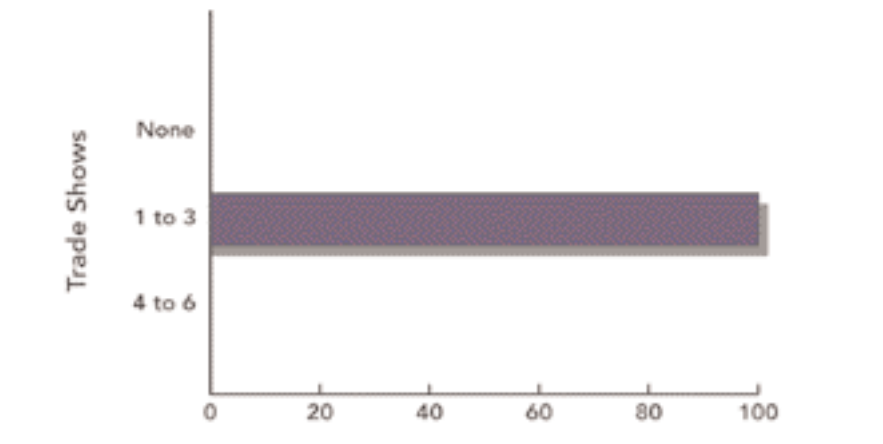


Figure 6. Of all the trade shows respondents have attended in the past 12 months, how many have provided them with legitimate trends they have applied to their business?

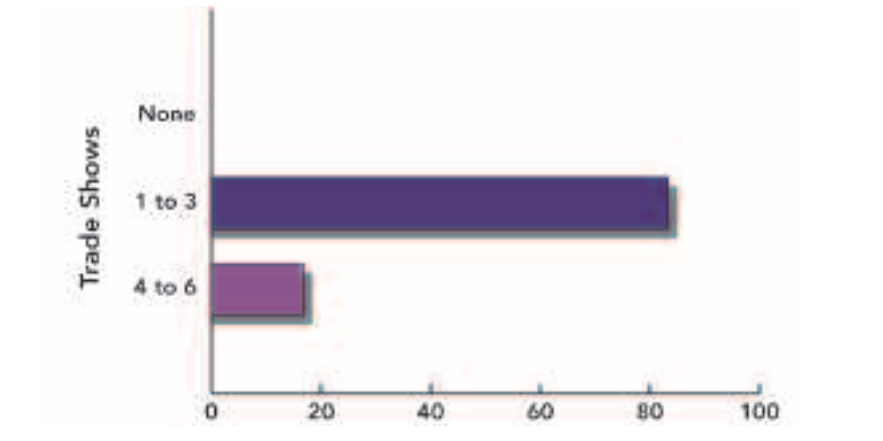


Figure 7. How many trade shows have respondents made purchases at in the past 12 months?

your area as opposed to trends 500 miles away that might not be so popular in your neck of the woods.

Surroundings. Trends are everywhere, and if you're like me you find yourself noticing things in the oddest places — in friend's houses, at the museum, even in the grocery store. Just driving down the street or taking an evening walk can show you what some consumers are getting into on the outside of their homes.

And my favorite: You can sometimes even look into the windows as you're walking by (without getting to the point of a peeping Tom) to see how people are decorating their homes.

Other media. We covered con-

sumer publications, but we haven't talked about television and radio. Lately, I've talked to many retailers who participate in some sort of radio or television program that helps consumers understand more about gardening. This is a good way to get your name out there, but it is also a great way to find trends. Just by listening to callers' questions and comments, you can get an idea of what is on the average consumer's mind. So, even if you don't participate, it may be beneficial to turn on that Saturday morning gardening radio program and listen while you finish your chores.

Industry friends. This industry is a close-knit group that has no



Talking to others in the industry can provide you with numerous trends, as seen here at ANLA's Management Clinic.

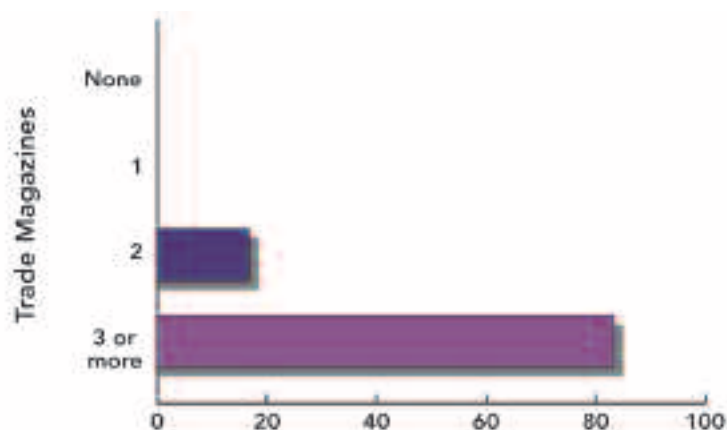


Figure 8. How many trade magazines do respondents read each month?

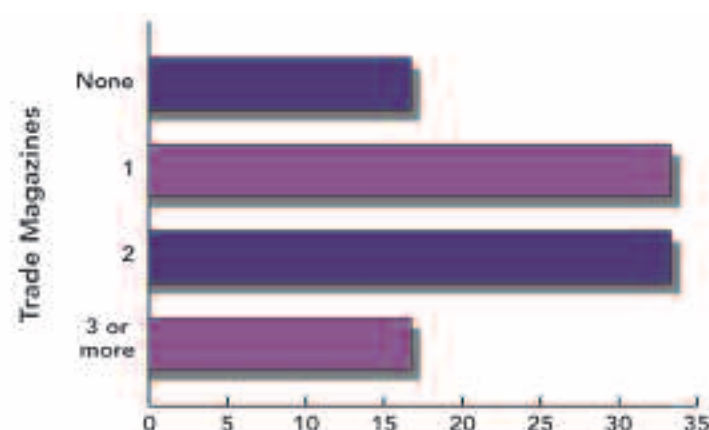


Figure 9. Of all the trade magazines respondents have read in the past 12 months, how many have provided them with legitimate trends they've applied to their business?

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problem helping each other out. That is apparent at any trade show or event. Sometimes, here at the magazine, we get an urge to call up one of our industry friends and swap gossip or just talk about stuff, that usually ends up in talking shop — most of the time about industry things, but sometimes just about life.

When you're thinking about the order you are about to send in and notice some items on there that you're not quite sure about, call up a buddy you met at last month's show or event and see what he/she has to say about it; that is when you get 100-percent honesty, and yes, you've heard it before: Honesty is the best policy.

GETTING IT RIGHT

Through Their Eyes

There are many consumer publications out there that relate to gardening and home decor. Here are just a few suggestions we've found helpful in the trend race.

American Gardener

www.ahs.org/publications/the_american_gardener

Better Homes & Gardens

www.bhg.com

Birds & Blooms

www.birdsandblooms.com

Carolina Gardener

www.carolinagardener.com

Country Living

www.magazines.ivillage.com/countryliving

The English Garden

www.theenglishgarden.co.uk/

Fine Gardening

www.taunton.com/finegardening

Garden Design

www.gardendesignmag.com

Horticulture

www.hortmag.com

People, Places & Plants

www.ppplants.com

Women's Day

www.womansday.com

After looking at the results of this summary, it looks as though the majority of retailers are actively looking for trends, whether it be through one of the mentioned avenues or all of them. And, that is what is most

important — look for trends; they are everywhere — some easily accessible, some not, but they're there, and you have no excuse when it comes to keeping up.

Carrie Burns is associate editor of Lawn &

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