

"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.

Stayin' Alive

This month, our panelists let us know what they do to keep their plants alive and healthy. We asked them to share any maintenance techniques and/or products they use in their gardens.

Becky, 48 Dallas, Texas

"I have a few flower gardens spread throughout my yard. We have a sloping front yard where erosion takes place with the spring rain. Every March or April, I must clear out the leaves and weeds and then add rich soil. Some years, I will spread large-sized bark chips. I have purchased perennials in the past, but never seem to keep them healthy during the Texas summers to allow them to bloom the next year. For me, I just purchase annuals every year.

"In the back yard, I have found potted plants do better. I buy large baskets and re-pot them in my containers. In the front yard, I will plant them in the soil. When I first plant, I will add MiracleGro to jump start things, but after that, I do well just by watering them often.

"I have some roses in the side yard and use fertilizer and pest/black spot chemicals on them. Other than the roses, I rarely do anything else."



Kelley, 27 Chicago, Ill.

"My 'garden' is just a pot of ivy that I rescued from my old job. It was nearly dead and barely green at all. When I brought it home, I poured out all the old dirt and refilled the pot with some potting soil that I purchased at the drug store. This seemed to help a lot. I changed the soil again about three years later. My plant sits by a window that faces west. I water it every few days, mostly when I notice it getting droopy, but he's a pretty tough little guy and can go a week or more without water.

"As for chemicals and fertilizers, I haven't had the need to use them. If I ever do have a garden, I would like to think that I'll keep it organic — compost for fertilization, alternatives to pesticides, etc."



Paquita, 55 Redlands, Calif.

"I use a systemic on my roses and some snail bait in the spring. Other than that, I release ladybugs and praying mantis each year. I did lose some trees to the much-loathed glassy winged sharpshooter a couple of years back. There is not much you can do about them except cut back the diseased wood.

"Nut grass is a real local problem. That stuff can pierce and grow through carpet and asphalt roofing shingles, both of which I have used as a base in my native plant borders beneath the wood chips. So Round Up has become my best friend. The only fertilizers I use are B-1 when I plant, a weed and feed product on the lawn twice a year, the rose food I mentioned and maybe some steer manure every three years or so."



Questions To Consider

- Are there any local problems (pests, diseases, regulations, etc.) affecting your region that your customers may not know about? Do you keep products readily available for such problems?
- Do you keep instruction sheets in your store containing tips for potting and protecting plants?
- How do you encourage customers who don't use fertilizers or pest control to treat their gardening problems?