

"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.

# Suggestion Box

Independent garden centers have a huge leg up on the big boxes for customer service and plant quality. But take a cue from our consumer panelists: There's always more you could be doing. Listen up!

**Luis, 76**  
**Rockford, Ill.**

My local garden center has a comprehensive product line, and I generally have not had problems finding what I'm looking for. There are, however, some concerns that I have. One is the frequent promotion of plants that are not hardy in our area. A good garden center should concentrate on plants that thrive in the local horticultural Zone. I know that sometimes one can get by with more tender perennials or woody plants in sheltered areas, but the garden center should be certain that customers are aware of any special requirements for such plants.

In the same vein, there should be an obvious warning about the invasive tendencies of some plants. Too often, the information is a footnote at the bottom of the label, which is buried in the soil or not present at all.



**Sonia, 25**  
**Miami**

Much to my dismay, I don't have a local independent garden center close enough to where I live. All of the IGCs in my area have closed down as the cost of real estate in the metropolitan area became too expensive in recent years. I typically make my garden purchases at Home Depot or Target. I love to just browse and look for ideas. I wish garden centers had displays of sample designs to help amateur landscape designers, like myself, get ideas for different seasons.

Another thing I would love to see is more creative planters. No more terra cotta! I am willing to pay more money for essentially a "piece of art." I'd like to see more modern, sleek, trendy designs. I also wish they had a wider variety of exotic plants. This is what would make my garden unique and interesting compared to other gardens. Gardening is an expressive art form and a creative outlet. Garden centers should take note of that when deciding what kinds of plants and products to offer.



**Marie, 57**  
**Mission Hills, Kan.**

I'm fortunate to have a diverse collection of garden centers within easy driving distance from my home. My favorite has a wide array of annuals and perennials and meets all my basic needs for spring planting. So why would I go elsewhere? At least two reasons.

One nearby garden center has the area's best display of herbs, displayed in an accessible manner to compare the varieties. They also display hand-printed placards with tips on how to use them, from the best herbs for ethnic cuisines or ideas to enliven dinner-time favorites.

Another small garden center has a knowledgeable, creative staff. I always visit this center in the spring to be inspired by their creative combinations. The staff will plant containers for you, help you plant them in-store or simply sell you the merchandise and send you on your way. I loyally return each year for a dose of new ideas — and several dozen plants to bring them to fruition.



## Questions to Consider

- Do your plant tags provide all the necessary information to help your customers be successful?
- Is your selection of containers and accessories varied enough to suit all types of customers?
- Do you merchandise product displays in a way to inspire young gardeners seeking guidance?