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Listen to Your X

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It seems that everyone is always talking about how we're going to get Gen X and Y into garden centers. I know there are articles, PowerPoints and seminars given on this topic all the time. It also seems that no one is even sure if Gen X and Y have the slightest inclination to garden (of course they do!). Some people already have such poor opinions of these insufferable whippersnappers, or have heard that they only have time for video games and admiring themselves in the mirror, that they have already thrown in the towel.

Well, I'm as Gen X as they come, from the first days of MTV to my grungy high school flannels, and I rock the garden. Although recently my trips to garden centers are utilitarian, at best. That's not by my choice. My favorite garden shops are heavy on plants and light on accoutrement—because I don't need an $80 floral print watering can or a beaded fancy string to hold my reading glasses or a Vera Bradley tea cozy. I like garden centers that are plant-centric and skip the foof, since none of that foof is aimed at me, anyways. Plants bridge all generations.

Would I buy stuff at a garden center if there was stuff aimed at my generation?

Hellebore, yeah. I would.

So what can you do to get those that you want, yet fear, in the door? Ask the Gen X and Yers in your employment what it would take to get their friends in the door. A workshop on terrariums? Maybe a balcony gardening or rooftop gardening weekend event? How to add an outdoor space where you can play video games while admiring oneself in a mirror? Classes and advice in affordable landscape basics? Teaching the fundamentals of organic vegetable growing?

And then how would your Y or X staffer suggest that you get the word out about all this extra effort you're taking to woo their kind? A sign in front of the store? An email blast? An ad in the paper? Radio jingles? Facebook and Twitter? A banner being pulled by a plane? Message in a bottle? Fliers dropped by a helicopter? Oh, I have it! Facepainting! Just paint the details on willing customers' faces for a few weeks prior to the event! Or, you may have some totally connected Gen X and Y people in your midst that can hook you up with a complete guest list!*

Would you consider asking younger employees to look through catalogs to see what merchandise they'd part with their hard-earned dollars for? Think about taking them to trade shows or flower and garden shows. Ask them what flowers they think are cool. Ask them to bring in photos of things they find inspirational. Ask for their point of view about displays and end caps. If you gave them a shopping cart and asked them to fill it with stuff you currently have in stock that they love, what would be in that cart? If you don't have any Gen X or Ys, would you consider finding some to ask? Would it be worth it to even pay some for their opinions?

I can't speak for two whole generations (although I'm bossy enough to try), but I know we all have the same needs everyone else does. We want to relax, get some sun, have nice stuff and eat foods that are good for us. I'm not 100% sure why it's so hard to tap into that, but it seems like it has been. All in all, you just have to think a little cooler, a little simpler, a little hipper…or just remember to ask your X. **GP**

**Use discretion and good judgment when listening to your X or Y. If they suggest a keg and Jell-O shots to get 'em in the door, perhaps defer to local laws.*

Amanda Thomsen is Kiss My Aster!, a funky, punky gardening blog planted at KissMyAster.com and FineGardening.com. You can follow her on Twitter at @KissMyAster or check out the party at the Kiss My Aster! Facebook page.