

Columns

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The New Trendsetters

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Step back five or more years. Close to 100% of the trends in gardening were being set by our industry. National trends were presented on television by the Marthas, Jamies and P. Allens, or maybe an inspired set designed for a TV or movie studio. You could also see them in the latest issue of “Better Southern Home & Fine Garden Living.” Locally, landscape designers set regional trends that attracted attention. And hopefully, the independent garden center was there to support and possibly even create our own trends. Short of the occasional screwball, it was fairly nice and neat. We had the pulse. We had control.

Today, with tablet ownership estimated at 25% and sometimes even higher (I’m sure it’s higher for our target demographic!), garden trends are coming from all over the place. Pinterest, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, the list grows every day. And don’t forget all the Garden Bloggers. The biggest difference? It’s not Martha or Jamie or P. Allen out there trending. It’s artists, homemakers and many of the afore-mentioned screwballs that are sharing their ideas and creations for the home and garden with an online community. These people can be extremely in touch with the pulse of trends and incorporate ideas from numerous fields, not just Home & Garden. These people, often, are NOT trained in horticulture and may have little to no real plant experience.

This brings us to what I see a lot of today. Garden trends set by non-gardeners (I don’t mean to imply they don’t garden, they’re just not “pros”) that may or may not be horticulturally sound. My faves: Hanging Moss Balls, Miniature Terrariums, Pallet Planters and the Plastic Dinosaur Planter. Again, a simple browse of “Gardening” on Pinterest, Stumbleupon or Tumblr will show you literally hundreds of ideas from all sorts of sources. Recycling/repurposing has blended with imagination to bring about tons of weird concoctions.

So, this leaves us IGC people with a fundamental question to answer: Do we encourage or even drive these “questionable” trends or do we educate and possibly alienate? There may be a little ground in the middle. We’re always striving to make it easier for our customers. Ensure more success. I feel it’s important that we do offer an education of these trends and why they may be difficult—if not downright impossible—in the long run. If your customer knows what they’re getting into from the start, they’re less likely to feel disappointment if they’re not successful. They may even see your warning as a challenge, which could spawn a true gardener! If

we don't offer the products and support, we're not only leaving money on the table, we're showing that we don't keep up with trends in our own industry.

We see these items and immediately think "That won't work" or "That's going to be difficult to keep alive," but our social media-savvy customers see them and say, "I want THAT!" Provide them with what we can, educate them on the pitfalls and create a customer that trusts you and knows you're up-to-date with the new world around you. **GP**

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