

## Columns

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### Grow with GWA

*Maria Zampini*

Independent retail garden centers and growers are all working long and hard to capture the attention of consumers at this critical time of the year. If you're looking to get ahead of the competition, I've got a suggestion: consider partnering with GWA: The Association of Garden Communicators. It consists of more than 1,250 professional green industry communicators who reach more than 84 million consumer gardening households. You'd be hard pressed to find another organization in our green world that has as much contact with the end user of our products as GWA.

Think of GWA members as part of your marketing staff. They're experienced in crafting messages that support gardening and landscaping, and have an average of more than 10 years of experience in writing. Members come from varied mediums, including book authors, bloggers, staff editors, syndicated columnists, freelance writers, photographers, speakers, landscape designers, television and radio personalities, consultants, publishers, extension service agents and more.

Diane Blazek, Executive Director of All-America Selections and the National Garden Bureau relayed to me why AAS and NGB works with garden communicators. She said, "I describe this group of communicators as the vital link between the green industry and the consumer. The diversity of garden communicators is exactly what we need to reach the many types of consumers whom we want to reach. If we wish to inform the culinary gardeners with news about new vegetables, then we go to the bloggers who focus on vegetables and cooking. If there are new varieties of ornamentals that work well in the landscape, then we work with the container/landscape design bloggers and journalists. For a small business, working with a professional group whose numbers and specialties are vast, it greatly improves our reach!"

So, if I've piqued your interest, you're probably asking, "How do I find a GWA member today"? It's easy-peasy. Simply visit [www.gardenwriters.org](http://www.gardenwriters.org), click on the "Meet GWA" tab and select "GWACConnect" to access a database of professional communicators. It's searchable by type of communicator and area of expertise, as well as location.

GWA offers several opportunities to network face-to-face with "influencer" members. First off, keep your eyes peeled for GWA members at industry trade shows. They'll be the ones with the #MeetGWA green ribbons on their badges. Or stop at our booth at Cultivate'17 or MANTS'18.

Another option is to go to the “Events” tab on the GWA website where you’ll find a list of regional events. GWA is comprised of seven different regions internationally. These events provide you the chance to network with members in your area in a smaller, more intimate setting. They include educational workshops and garden tours. These day-long regional meetings are open to members and non-member green industry types.

Lastly, attend, sponsor or exhibit at GWA’s Annual Conference and Expo. This year, GWA is headed to Buffalo, New York. With more than 300 attendees, it’s the largest gathering of professional garden communicators in the country. Attendees are always seeking to learn about new gardening products, plants, tools and fresh ideas. Exhibiting or sponsoring provides your company essential brand exposure.

GWA can also provide more conventional options for distributing information to its members, including advertising in their newsletter, eblast distribution and mailing labels. GWA’s bi-monthly publication, On the QT, is the publication for horticultural communicators and provides insightful information related to the business of garden writing. This publication and/or the email distribution is an opportunity to inform 2,000 member contacts about your latest products, plants, services, news and information.

GWA’s tag line reads: “Connect. Learn. Grow.” Life and business is a two-way street. By green industry businesses partnering with GWA, we can achieve so much more. Let’s learn and grow faster together. **GP**

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