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Owning the Message

Jennifer Polanz



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It's officially fall and my favorite time of year. From flannel to my beloved Buckeyes (for better or for worse), chili in the big pot on the stove and, yes, pumpkin spice lattes (but only lattes, thank you very much), fall has it all.

And the colors—oh my, the colors. Our Japanese maples cycle through a riot of reds and maroons to put on quite the show, along with all the other trees in the neighborhood. I love seeing the fall porch décor popping up before all the Halloween items start making their appearances. I see wreaths, hay bales, corn stalks and, of course, the ubiquitous mums showing off their fall-centric colors.

What I love to see, too, are all the garden centers shouting their love for fall from the rooftops with emails and social media posts about porch pot workshops and other activities that get customers more involved in their fall decorating. Make a wreath for your door and then build a container to match. Of course, many of you host fall festivals and events, which do the double duty of making memories and creating a bond to your stores.

For last month's cover story, I interviewed our *Green Profit*/The Garden Center Group Young Retailer Award Winner Michael Fiore. During our chat, he said something that I think is worth spending a little more ink on: taking back the message. Or owning your message. He talked about how influencers and others on social media filled a void by talking about gardening and houseplants, often because garden retailers can be shy about getting their message out there, especially on camera. In a way, it was as if our industry was following behind those who were so vocal on social media, rather than leading the messaging.

You are the experts and there's plenty of room for you to get your message out to the people. That's why I think all the fall messaging I'm seeing is great—the workshops are highlighting your expertise while also creating experiences and extending the season. For those who ride this wave right into the holidays, it's vital to keep that messaging going.

As independent retailers continue to set themselves apart from their competition, education and brand awareness are two keys to widening that gap. If you're knowledgeable about the challenges your customers face while gardening in your climate, then make sure you're educating them through the media they consume regularly. It might not always be social—it could be on the local news, or through video and blog posts pushed out from your newsletter. But if you're not educating them, then someone else will be, and the chances are good that you're going to have to correct a lot of misinformation.

Speaking of education, that's what we do here, too. This issue is pretty packed, starting with our cover story on pollinator plant options from Andrew Bunting, who aside from being the vice president of horticulture at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, is also a fount of knowledge. Find out which pollinators you might be missing out on.

This is our soil and amendments issue, too, and I talked to a number of manufacturers to get the low-down on what's in those mixes you sell and why those ingredients are in there. This might be worth sharing with newbies who can use this info to help sell more bagged soils and amendments.

I'll let you find the rest of the goodies in here and I look forward to continuing to hear our industry lead the messaging going out to consumers. Let's get loud! **GP**