

12/1/2023

Let's Talk About Sustainability

Jennifer Polanz



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It's time. We have to brag on ourselves a little bit, in the interest of keeping our somewhat attentive consumer audience involved.

I'm talking about our industry's efforts to provide products that help the environment. Are we perfect? Far from it, but let's not let that stop us. I hear a lot of hesitation from members of our industry, who cite some of our imperfections. I understand the hesitation, but as long as we don't profess to be perfect, it's okay to talk about some of the gains we've made.

I see so many more pollinator and native plants being sold at retail, as well as eco-friendly pots and efforts to collect plastic pots for recycling. Kudos go out to Proven Winners for developing their Eco+ compostable pots, East Jordan Plastics for recycling nearly 20 million pounds of horticulture plastic each year and to HC Companies for designing its low-profile trays, reducing the amount of plastic used (just to name a few).

Our industry has continued to see a tremendous shift to natural and biocontrol products, both on the grower and the consumer sides, reducing our overall chemical use when possible. On the retail side, I see movement toward more energy-efficient operations, including drip irrigation and energy curtains, solar panels to generate electricity and consumer-facing services like installing electric vehicle chargers in the parking lot, among other actions.

We have a lot to be proud of (and a lot more work to do). It's a topic that consumers want to hear about, too. In their 2024 Trends Report, Garden Media Group heavily focuses on eco-optimism, a need from consumers looking to improve the environment around them in some way. We can (and should) help them with these endeavors. To that end, this issue focuses heavily on the plant part of that equation—more specifically on native and nativar plants that retailers can carry to keep customers feeling good about their landscapes.

Check out the results of a new study by university researchers about how retailers can best position natives in their stores based on survey results from consumers. Then, check out Dr. Richard Ludwig's piece on landscape design techniques to help customers best position their plants for maximum appeal.

So how do you get the word out about your eco-accomplishments? Social media can be a great tool for that and we've tapped Jessie Jacobson, president and owner of Tonkadale Greenhouse in Minnetonka, Minnesota, to give us the rundown on how they handle their digital media presence.

We would also like to share the steps you're taking to make your operations more sustainable—as they say, a rising

tide lifts all boats. If our industry can move forward as a whole, our customers will appreciate the efforts and (hopefully) think about shopping us before anyone else. Share your sustainability efforts with me at jpolanz@ballpublishing.com.

And, finally, I want you to know how much we at Ball Publishing appreciate all your hard work throughout the year. Have a joyous and relaxing holiday and New Year! **GP**