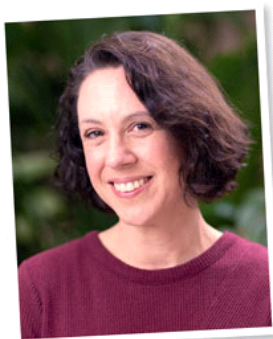


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Providing a Choice

Jennifer Polanz



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I'm always in awe and sometimes a little jealous when I see a gorgeous mixed container. I don't have the artistic eye for combinations that designers do, so when I see something that's put together just so, I get excited.

Our cover this month, for instance. The photo was taken by container designer Howard Nemeroff, who owns Plant Parenting in Chicago. No lie—I have opened the cover file every day since Anissa, our artist, sent it over. It perfectly evokes the colors and vibe of fall, my favorite season.

It's a great illustration of what designers can do, too, which is the point of our cover story highlighting a few members of the new Digging In Association for container garden designers. It began as an informal group, but has grown in membership and formally became an association this summer. It speaks to the popularity of container gardening as a whole and the possibilities available to those who want to pursue it as a career. You can read more about it and get a sampling of what members. If your garden center has someone who specializes in container design, I urge you to consider a membership—the association shares information, provides resources and meets annually.

Sometimes choice is fraught and I feel like certain categories lend themselves to fewer choices. I may be going out on a limb here, but I think while people may want to mull over a mum versus a dark-leaved heuchera or pansies as a fall offering, they're less likely to peruse bagged soils while sipping a latte. The soil is something customers want to know works well, and if they trust you, they trust your selections and will buy what you recommend. If they need it, they'll buy it—so make sure it's the one you want them to buy.

And that's not to belittle the soil—in my mind, soils and amendments are the most important products the consumer can buy, right along with fertilizer. That triumvirate will go way farther than anything else a customer can buy to keep a plant healthy and happy from the start, which makes their selection even more vital. Read more on strategies for soil sales and narrowing the selection.

On the other hand, when it comes to deer-proofing the garden, you can never have too many choices in plants that are deer-resistant. I, especially, can't have too many choices (see the picture I took while lounging on my back patio this summer). Lowell Halvorson knows this problem too well and wrote about how to shift your inventory to accommodate customers looking for more options to reduce snacking.

Choice also is necessary when it comes to replacing ash trees, which have been decimated in certain parts of the U.S. by Emerald Ash Borer. What can you offer them instead that will provide a similar dappled shade, a sturdy

frame and multi-season interest?

And, finally, the choices you make for inventory depend on the type of merchandise you're providing your customer. Consultant Sid Raisch gives us a rundown on the five types of merchandise to know and how to manage it.

There's lots more in this issue to peruse, so get your PSL and your flannel blanket (or for those of you in the South, a cold brew and a fan) and dive in. **GP**