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Providing Solutions

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By the time you read this, you're either in the middle of your spring (lookin' at you, Southern states) or you're in full-on prep mode as the much-awaited Spring Equinox approaches March 20. As I write this, though, it doesn't look much like spring at all where I'm at in Northeast Ohio, as my perennials and shrubs slumber under a blanket of ice and snow.

Nevertheless, we look forward, to a time of rejuvenation, renewal and, a little more bluntly, profits. Some retailers have gotten a head start on that last part, though, with active promotions throughout the winter months and with pre-order options that have customers paying in late winter for pickup after their frost date. It's a great way to bring in revenue during off-peak times, but it's a process you really need to be prepared for ahead of time with great photography, an e-commerce platform and the

stock to fulfill orders when it's time. The two garden centers I see do this consistently well are Deb's Greenhouse in Morinville, Alberta, Canada, and Groovy Plants Ranch in Marengo, Ohio, if you're looking for inspiration.

Generating excitement is part of the fun of late winter, as any gardener worth their salt is stir-crazy and ready to get back at it. Seed catalogs and starter kits only go so far. I bought a pack of Burpee's brand new Garden Sown Rain Drops hybrid tomato seeds that you can sow directly in the ground a week before your last frost and I'm COUNTING the days until I can add these to my raised bed. It's the little things that get us through the winter up here.

But to get you through, we have stories this month that hopefully provide you with solutions for the coming year. Whether it's new products, trends information, plant-based solutions or new revenue streams that you can add, we're looking for ways to help you generate that excitement for your customers year-round.

Our Ball Publishing team strikes out every January in search of new products. Last year, I couldn't participate due to a bout of COVID, but this year I stayed healthy enough to get to market in Atlanta (it was cold, but not the worst it's ever been for market). Jen Zurko tackled MANTS in Baltimore, and Ellen Wells and Chris Beytes took on TPIE in Ft. Lauderdale (you be the judge on who got the best assignment). You can check out all the cool products we found for retail and then head over to *GrowerTalks* to check out grower highlights from the shows.

In the January issue of *Green Profit*, I ran some of the basic findings from Axiom's 2025 Garden Outlook Study. For this month I asked Axiom Founder and CEO Mike Reiber to put those findings into more context based on what he's seen with his consumer studies over the years. He did not disappoint, and identified some key ways independent retailers can provide solutions and fill the needs of their customers.

From high level to down in the dirt, we've got lots of solutions in this issue, including plants you can offer customers for some of the toughest spots to landscape: banks and slopes. And we have more off-peak season revenue ideas from Gail Vanik. Gail and her husband, Vic, owned a very successful garden center in Colorado for many years and are now consulting in the industry as service providers for The Garden Center Group. One of my favorites she mentions is their Luminaria Night, a community-focused event that brought in families and community members over the holidays.

Of course, there's always more in these pages and hopefully you find some solutions that can help with the challenges of retail in 2025. And if you need me, you can find me circling my favorites in well-worn plant catalogs and dreaming of warmer weather. **GP**