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## What is Fall for?

Jennifer Polanz



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How many of you thought in your head—or said out loud—“Fall is for Planting”?

It's one of those slogans that's been around since seemingly forever (Dr. Marvin Miller helped me track it back to the 1960s via Bob Dolibois' autobiography ). But anyone in the hort industry for more than a minute knows scientifically fall is a great time to plant, which makes the slogan a great one. However, despite the most Herculean of efforts on the part of retailers, it seems customers don't often want to plant in the fall. At this point, I feel a little bit like we're trying to make fetch happen (it's a “Mean Girls” reference, if you don't know).

Are we forcing it? Are fall weekends made for apple-picking, watching (college) football and running to all your kids' sporting events? I can say unequivocally yes on the last two, though I do my best to get out in the yard and garden at some points. Are we running into a brick wall?

I don't have any answers, and it's frustrating to see because it's such a prime opportunity and a killer message—planting at the right time gives you the greatest success. Who doesn't want to be successful? And who doesn't want to blunt a rough spring with another peak in the fall?

Here's my take on fall planting that transitioned into a Halloween display on my porch. Dark, moody and long-lasting.



But at the same time, do we have to meet the customer where they're at? In wide swaths of the country when spring breaks, we're all hungry for the outdoors after being cooped up all winter and ready for color. Then the kids get out of school and time slows enough to get projects done.

But during fall, school goes back into session and kids start activities again. So what do we need then? Probably convenience. What makes me think there's still a chance here is the sheer amount of fall decorating that goes on in August through October, inside and outside the home. How do we capitalize on that?

One thing I talked with Gail Pabst at National Garden Bureau about is the continuing popularity of goth gardening. It's really just creating a vibe with dark and moody plants (in case you don't dig the name). But consumers are still all about it—one of the two goth gardening blogs on the NGB website are in the Top 10 pages on the website from month to month.

Perhaps it's leaning in to fall decor instead of just planting in the ground? I saw some really fabulous fall porch and patio pots the last couple of years during the Garden Center Group Fall Event retail tour. These are a great way to give customers color and convenience.

If you want to continue to focus on perennials, shrubs and trees during the fall, perhaps focusing on their pollinator benefits could help seal the deal? I take a dive into how we can double down on this continuing trend to sell even more pollinator plants and accompanying products.

Another option might be to give them a different look at the native plants that are so popular now. Botany owner Benjamin Futa describes his Plug Bar concept and how it's a great entryway into a beautiful landscape.

Fall also might be the time that your customers struggle with keeping plants in the landscape alive, especially if the summer was particularly dry or super wet (recently, it's more likely it was dry). To that end, Bill McCurry tackled the idea of plant guarantees, and asked a number of retailers and experts their thoughts on offering one.

While working on that story, Bill was sent a training video that talks about how to approach customer interactions like when they want to return something. He talks more about it in his column and includes a link to the video. I highly encourage a watch—it's the only training video I've ever seen that made me emotional. Seriously.

As we near the holidays and move into the winter portion of our program, it's a great time to take a step back and really think about the things that worked last year, the strategies that didn't and formulate a successful plan for 2026. Where does fall fit into that? What's the strategy? If you care to share, email me at [jpolarz@ballpublishing.com](mailto:jpolarz@ballpublishing.com).

Here's to making fall happen! **GP**