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Features

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Consumers Are Ready to Garden

Mike Reiber

Our 2026 Axiom Gardening Outlook Study paints a picture of a gardening market that isn't cooling off, but instead gearing up for a year of growth. Independent garden centers and nurseries are entering 2026 with an advantage. Gardeners aren't backing away—they're leaning in.

More Time and Money Gardening

In 2025, 47.6% of respondents spent more time gardening than the previous year—the highest level reported since 2022. Gardeners who spent 50% more time in the garden rose by 27% vs. 2024. Those who spent 100% more time increased by 41%. Nearly half of respondents spent more money on their gardens in 2025. This represents an 11.5% increase vs. 2024. Four in 10 respondents expect to spend even more money gardening in 2026. Fifty percent say they plan to spend more time gardening in 2026.

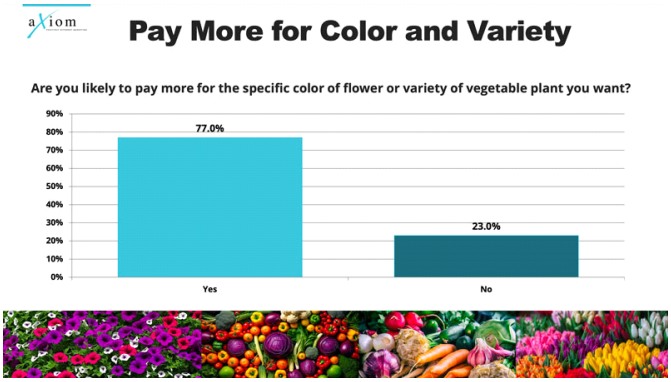
Upshot: Gardening remains a resilient and emotionally important activity in uncertain times. How will you profit?

> **The 2026 Garden Outlook Study**
> Axiom Marketing surveyed 500 U.S. homeowners who purchased plants. The respondents were pulled from Axiom's proprietary panel of 70 million people, and the survey took place via the internet during September and October 2025.
> GO HERE to read the full 2026 study, as well as access previous studies conducted by Axiom Marketing.

Bigger Gardens, Higher Expectations

A record two-thirds of respondents plan to plant more and expand their gardens in 2026. This is the highest expansion intent that we've seen to date on this question.

Even though 38% of respondents described themselves as being highly satisfied with the quality of their flowers, fruits and vegetables in 2025, 45.7% want more blooms, fruits and vegetables in the coming season.



Upshot: This combination—high satisfaction and hunger for more—spotlights a confident gardener who may be ready to invest in both plants and support products to improve performance. In addition, higher expectations create a major selling opportunity for independents because it shifts the conversation from commodity price comparisons to performance with higher margin products.

Gen Y and Gen Z Take the Lead

Our report highlights growth by younger gardeners. In 2025, Gen Y and Gen Z were far more likely than Gen X to report spending more time in their gardens. Roughly two-thirds of each younger group increased their time spent gardening compared to about one-third of Gen X respondents.

They also led in spending in 2025. Sixty-one percent of Gen Y and 54% of Gen Z respondents reported spending more money on gardening in 2025 vs. 43% of Gen X respondents.

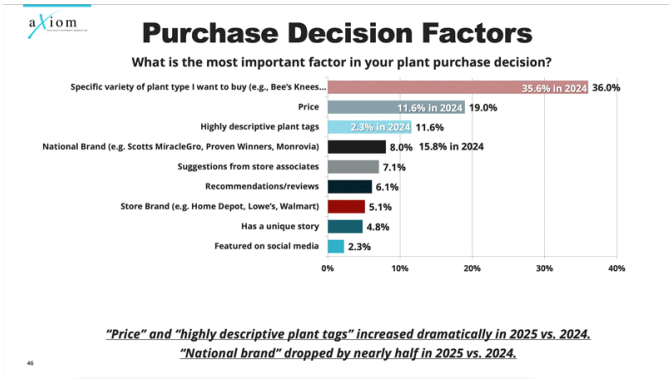
Looking toward 2026, two-thirds of both Gen Y and Gen Z respondents expect to spend more time gardening. Sixty-four percent of Gen Y respondents and 50% of Gen Z respondents expect to spend more money on gardening, outpacing Gen X by a wide margin.

Upshot: The implication here is NOT to abandon your base, but to broaden it. It's more about taking an unbiased look at things that are meaningful to Gen Y and Gen Z. For example: Strong digital content that inspires; signage that teaches and that's more than a label; success shortcuts, starter solutions, project kits; etc.

Channel Shifts

Our 2026 Garden Outlook Study also hints at a subtle shift to where gardeners shop. Home Depot's share as the retailer where respondents purchased most of their plants dropped from 33.9% in 2024 to 23.6% in 2025. Lowe's and Walmart also saw declines.

For the first time, we asked questions about trips to independent garden centers. Four in 10 gardeners made four to seven trips to independent garden centers during the 2025 season. Forty percent reported spending more than 30 minutes per visit and 37% cited inspiration as the top factor that would encourage them to spend more time and money at independent garden centers.



Upshot: Your customers see you as a trusted retailer. Better yet, they like the inspiration you provide that fuels their creativity. That's why they buy more confidently and purchase higher-margin products. These are all things that mass merchants are less able to provide.

Technology: Google Lens

If there's one insight that independents should act on immediately, it's Google Lens. Forty-two percent of respondents named it as the most important smartphone app that they use to learn about new plants. Google Lens is a gift to independents. It rewards discovery. A customer can see a plant online, snap a photo

and come to your store looking for it.

Upshot: If your assortment is shallow, your labeling is weak or your staff isn't trained, you'll lose the sale. Focus on making your store easily searchable with clear signage, highly visible variety names, tags that teach and well-trained staff.

Wrapping It Up

The strongest message in our 2026 Gardening Outlook study is that gardeners aren't disengaging—they're escalating. They're expanding, experimenting and having higher expectations for what their gardens can produce.

In an economy still defined by cost-sensitivity and uncertainty, gardening remains strong. For independents, this isn't a defensive year. Instead, it's a year to play offense by aligning merchandising, marketing and consumer experience with the priorities of home gardeners.

Independents are positioned better than their mass merchant competitors to win in this environment—because 2026 will reward selection, inspiration and expertise. **GP**

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> **Action Steps for IGCs in 2026**
>
> Double Down on Younger Gardeners
> - Turn content into short-form videos
> - Link videos to QR codes placed on tags and bench cards
> - Focus on checklists, and before and after projects
> - Make pricing feel accessible with good, better and best options
>
> Focus on What Makes Independents Special
> - Own inspiration with displays and expert help
> - Spotlight high performance genetics on bench cards and tags
> - Designate staff favorite SKUs for proven garden success
> - Create dedicated high-traffic space for new SKUs
>
> Focus on Varieties
> - Highlight benefits of specific varieties
> - Use simple and memorable words
> - Post benefits on bench cards and other signage
> - Sell garden performance, not price
>
> Sell Projects, Not Products
> - Curb appeal garden upgrades
> - Vegetable gardens
> - Automatic watering solutions
> - Complete pre-season social media surveys about the projects your customers are most interested in
>
> Build More Curb Appeal Programs
> - Create curb appeal "front yard collections"
> - Merchandise sun-tolerant color as "weekend makeover projects"

- Highlight total project budgets (e.g. “Front yard refresh for less than $150”)
- Host in-store or online how-to events that create urgency

Treat Edibles as a Core, Not a Sideline

- Expand labeling on veggies and herbs focusing on yield, success in the garden and container suitability
- Bundle soil, fertilizer, raised beds and trellises
- Create and promote “First Veggie Garden Kits”
- Never forget the value of fruit

Spotlight Water-Smart Solutions

- Merchandise products you carry that can assist with automatic watering and save time
- Position these SKUs as “garden success” insurance against droughts and watering bans
- Introduce your business to local water providers, which often offer rebates on water-saving products
- Stay updated on drought or sprinkling ban recommendations by local extension agents

Make Your Store More Shoppable for Google Lens Shoppers

- Ensure all plant tags and bench cards clearly show variety names
- Use big fonts that are easy to scan
- Add signage that says “Use Google Lens”
- Train staff to respond to “I saw this on Google Lens” questions