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First

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A Reason to Return

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There are some people who'll come back to the garden center and check in frequently in the "off season" to see what you have cookin' (that's people like me). There are others who need a little encouragement. They need a reminder that you aren't just there for six weeks (well, unless you are actually only there for six weeks, then we'll see you next year). Perennials are a great way to bring customers back in, and there are loads of ways to use them and talk about their benefits.

I got into planting more perennials thanks in part to reinforcement from Monarch caterpillars. Turns out, the more asclepias you plant, the more caterpillars you get. Funny how that works. I'm sure my family gets real tired of seeing the daily growth from baby 'pillars to humongous hungry teenagers who decimate the leaves on the plants, but I make them go out and see them anyway.

All that to say pollinators are a huge draw for perennials and there are people who are seeking out natives to build proper ecosystems on their properties, whether large or small. While the native/nativar discussion is complicated, our industry still has a real opportunity to talk about creating ecosystems and providing pollen and nectar for our busiest of bees and butterflies.

My colleague, Ellen Wells, just wrote in her *buZZ!* e-newsletter about how birding is becoming a favorite Gen Z past-time, and there are perennials to attract birds and hummingbirds, too (we'll have even more on plants for birds in the July issue). Cut flowers are also trending and are another additional benefit of perennials like echinacea, lavender, salvia, peonies and astilbe. In fact, I have dried perennial blooms in my house right now as decor.

There are so many reasons to love perennials, but there are speedbumps that go along with them, too. One is the whole "what's the difference between an annual and a perennial" discussion that requires attention. Also, they bloom at all different times (which is eventually a benefit) and it's harder for customers to get a full appreciation for them on the bench.

One way to alleviate some of the issues is to ensure you have customers' email addresses to be able to send them photos of what's in bloom on the perennial benches. Events for Pollinator Week (this month!) and cut flower classes, among other events, can be a great way to get customers in to see what's blooming.

Once they're in, how do they find the right plant for them? Ellen has you covered with her story on arranging perennials. She provides lots of options to consider.

Then freelancer Matt Olson continues to find cool plants to carry, this time with perennials. In fact, one of the plants he wrote about made the cover. (I literally said, "Oh cool!" out loud when I opened the file.)

Somewhat related to selling perennials, along with many other plants, is this month's Adapt or Die column from our three global consultants, John, Sid and Dries, talking about the importance of your website. And when it comes to trends, we have one of the best Trendspotters in the biz, Katie Elzer-Peters, who took a deep dive into maximalism this month. Boy, you could do up a maximalist garden big time with perennials!

If you're looking for additional ways to get repeat visits and bring customers back in, look no further than the essays written by this year's group of *Green Profit*/The Garden Center Group Young Retailer Finalists. Once again, we've chosen some impressive candidates and they did not disappoint with their essays. Meet them in person at this year's Unplugged Event at Cultivate'26 in Columbus on Monday, July 13, where we'll announce our winner.

I hope we've provided some inspiration for you to consider in bringing the joy of perennials to your customers. I know these plants have certainly brought joy to my garden.

Here's to repeat visits! **GP**