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Maxxing Out in 2026

Katie Elzer-Peters

Hank Green—writer, podcaster, YouTuber and brother of author John Green—has famously said, “I hate minimalism. That’s not my vibe. I want to feel like a wizard who is surrounded by the collections of his many adventures.” Me, too, Hank. I joke that my front room where I do my work and where I make most of my art is my “enclosure.” It’s filled with art and plants and books and trinkets and several faux taxidermy animals.



Top left: Create a color story with your displays like Louisa at Thanksgiving Farms. Notice how the plant food adds to the whimsy rather than subtracting. Many of the products we carry have colorful packaging. Use it!

Right: This photo is from one of artist John Derian’s three stores in New York City. He became famous for his decoupage designs (pictured), which are made with public domain images. The stores are a feast for the eyes. His trick is grouping many colors and patterns of one shape together. All the pencil cups. All the trinket trays. All the cake stands.

Inset: Heather has created a whimsical, creative paradise where clients can browse hats and patches, charms and scarves to create their own personalized, dopamine-fueled wardrobes. There’s a reason why fairy gardens were so popular for a while: people like collecting and creating their own little worlds.

Bottom: Reuse and recycle: This charming maximalist display at Mustard Seed Market, a garden center in Blowing Rock, North Carolina, incorporates new pots, old crates, recycled tubs and reclaimed church pews.

It doesn’t surprise me that during the coronavirus pandemic when no one could go anywhere people started amassing huge houseplant collections and going nuts enhancing their yards with color and texture and wonder.

When you can’t go anywhere, what do you do? You create an adventure around yourself.

I pitched this article (July 2025) shortly after Teresa Woodard’s prescient book “Garden to the MAX” was published. (Gorgeous photographs by Bob Stefko). I’d noticed several concurrent trends on the upswing: junk journaling, floral- and art-related LEGO set building, murals popping up everywhere, charm collecting, art cafes opening, blind boxes hitting shelves (there’s a treat in the box, you just don’t know which one it is), and bold, patterned wallpaper on everyone’s Pinterest boards.

Maximalism, it seemed, was settling in for a good, long run.

As I write this in May 2026, we’re experiencing a cost-of-living crisis and a jet fuel shortage.

Move over, Maximalism. Maxxing is here.

Or is it?

Per Merriam-Webster: “Maxxing (sometimes spelled maxing) describes the practice of optimizing a specific aspect of one’s life, often to an extreme degree. Although it was originally associated with words concerned with increasing one’s appeal or health (such as sleepmaxxing), -maxxing can now be applied in virtually any area someone might obsessively improve.”

As food and utility prices rise, everyone needs to squeeze every little bit of juice from everything they do/eat/see/read. AI anxiety makes everyone feel like they’re being left behind. A house down payment—what’s that?

When funds are tight and the future seems uncertain, at best, what do you do?

You create an adventure around yourself.

And that—that’s Maximalism, 2026 style.

The Joy of Maximalism

Teresa writes in the introduction to her book, “So what is maximalism? The style has its root in the art, fashion and design worlds leaning into a more-is-more mentality. It’s the opposite of minimalism with its neutral colors, tidy spaces and restrained accessories. Maximalism embraces strong colors, textures and layers to create a space packed with personality and joy. Still, maximalism isn’t just piling everything on and calling it a day—it’s as intentional and calibrated as any design trend.”

> **Maximalism Gallery**
> It took an extreme act of curation to narrow dozens of photos down to a select few to give you inspiration. Each one highlights a way you can maximize your retail space for dopamine decorators and color collectors.

If Maxxing is about anxiety, Maximalism is about fun.

So are all of those other hobbies and trends I mentioned: junk journaling, floral- and art-related LEGO set building,

murals popping up everywhere, charm collecting, art cafes, thrifting. Spend more than a few minutes on Instagram or Pinterest and you'll find trending posts and boards referencing vintage cake decorating, granny hobbies such as crochet, needlepoint and decoupage, and so many suggestions for "dopamine dressing," which is really just dressing with lots of color and pattern to match your taste rather than some arbitrary tastemaker's opinion.
Let's take a closer look at what Maximalism embraces:

- Strong colors
- Textures
- Layers

Sounds like garden design, yes?

To "create a space packed with personality and joy."

Garden centers: lock in. You were made for this trend.

Maximalize Responsibly
I talked with several people about why garden retailers should care about this trend and how to engage with it now. My first stop was to visit Heather Procknal at her shop Tiny Weld in Wilmington, North Carolina. It's a permanent jewelry and hat bar with a smattering of size-inclusive dopamine dressing options and a well-stocked charm selection.

"Leopard print is a neutral," Heather said. "And dopamine dressing means changing how you dress to change how you feel. Maximalism for no point other than excess is gross. But maximalism via intentional collecting and creative reuse is a way to create a joyful environment for yourself."
Did someone say creative reuse?

Louisa Zimmermann-Roberts, co-owner, grower and merchandiser at Maryland garden center Thanksgiving Farms, is a maximalist queen at home (she just painted her bathroom pink, but only because she couldn't choose between five different gorgeous colorful patterned wallpapers) and at the garden center. From an outsider's perspective, her secret weapon is paint. Yep. Paint. Benches painted purple. Walls painted blue. Teal pergolas and bright yellow doors.

"My family started in the produce business. The bigger and more colorful your display was the more you would sell. So I kind of do that with my displays," she said.

If you want to know how to merchandise blockbuster displays that sell out every time, just stalk her Facebook page (thanksgivingfarm). She has a degree in painting, but now she says that her displays are her paintings. YOU don't need a degree in painting to do what she does. Here are her tips:

- More is more! The more you have the more you'll sell. If you only buy one flat of this and one flat of that you aren't going to sell it all.
- Create displays that look like a garden. Put things together that grow together so it's easier to shop.
- Make things a thing! Invent a festival (ex. Poppy and Peony Palooza)

My tip? Go look at the way she merchandises plants and then evaluate your displays to see if they're creating a cheerful vibe.

“We have all the colors, all the textures, all the movement,” she said. “Garden centers should be everybody’s happy place. If there’s one thing we learned from the pandemic it is that people need flowers. Flowers make you feel good. Use that to your advantage. Everyone in the entire world wants to be happy and create their own little oasis.”

As a sidebar, we also discussed photos because she posts a lot and they’re great. “I hate it that we have all of these beautiful plants and so many garden centers use AI images to sell,” she told me, to which I said, “Me too.”

“Use your own photos everyone!” she replied.

Maximalize Crossover Audiences

You might want to make friends with some interior designers, though, Teresa said. “Liz Hughes, co-owner of Groovy Plants Ranch with husband Jared, and I did an event at Ballard Designs. Her garden is in the book,” she said. “We wanted to attract non-gardeners and show them how they can start with container gardening. The design studio talks about how you layer prints in a maximalist style. Liz and I were talking about layering plants. Some new gardeners are shy. They’ll plant three plants and mulch heavily around them. We wanted to give them permission to plant densely and plant a lot of plants, encouraging them to add another layer to their garden, whether that is planting some seeds and self sowers or planting a bulb layer. We discussed planting more densely, playing with heights and layering for seasons.”

She also made a connection between the rise of natives and naturalistic garden design and the interest in maximalism. “They’re densely packed and layered landscapes,” she said. That must be why I’m so obsessed with walking through any sort of tall-grass prairie landscape. I love being surrounded by plants. (And also able to see.)

Teresa says interior designers are good partners because they’re pulling out stuff for patio furniture and containers. They’re helping clients with front porch decorations. The partnerships make sense. Interior designers help clients curate collections in the home. Garden retailers can help people with collecting plants without descending into chaos.

Maximalize Creativity

Collecting, creating and curating are at the heart of maximalism and its associated trends. Throughout the summer we’ll be exploring these trends more, diving into the rise of maker spaces and ways that garden centers can capitalize on consumer desires to be more than an idle observer of their surroundings. Stay tuned. There’s more to come. **GP**

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