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The Power of Beauty

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This year, 2026, has not been a banner year so far, personally. If I'm being honest, it's been on the rougher side. There have been bright spots, though, and one of them has been getting back outside to garden.

A few years ago we invested in a new patio for our backyard, and as far as I'm concerned, it was worth every penny. It's large enough to accommodate several mixed containers that I fill with my plant samples from breeder companies (I have to say, there's a lot doing really well in my containers). Larger material goes in the curved landscape bed that hugs the outside of the patio, and any edibles go in the raised bed to the side, although that's also home to my new cut flower journey.

All of this has a backdrop of mostly maple trees set in a small woods behind our house, where I constantly hear rustling. So far this spring I've seen woodchucks, deer, a rabbit and possum, along with the ubiquitous squirrels, chipmunks, songbirds and now, ruby-throated hummingbirds (finally! It took them long enough to show up this year). I believe in the calming power of forest bathing, a practice in Japan called shinrin-yoku. I'm not sure if I have enough surrounding me for any true physical benefits, but it certain helps my mental health to start my day in that environment with a hot cup of coffee.

I've been thinking about this a lot—there's a reason we all want more plants in our lives (even those of us who don't fully understand why or how). Beautification improves our lives in so many different ways, and at the end of the day, that's what we're all here for in this industry, right? To beautify the lives of others, one plant at a time. So how can we all get more involved with beautification efforts?

Of course, the main organization that has been driving these efforts in the U.S. for a quarter of a century now is America In Bloom. Celebrating its 25th anniversary, the organization is hosting its Symposium and Awards in Washington, D.C., where the country will be celebrating a slightly larger 250th anniversary. To continue to raise awareness on this issue, I looked at beautification efforts and how either potentially legislating beautification or finding alternate strategies can forward the goal of more beautiful towns and cities across America.

Of course, to do that, we need increasingly better plant varieties to reduce disease and pest pressures, increase bloom performance and provide better success for customers looking to beautify their lives. The best place to find those is at CAST, and you can see what our editorial team found there this year.

One of the key components of relaxing in a wooded setting is birdsong. Andrew Bunting of the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society provides lots of options for attracting birds to the garden during multiple seasons. We've noted in recent months that birding is becoming a popular hobby again, with more than a third of Americans saying they engage in birdwatching, according to a study conducted by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Another component of beautification is the additional benefits it provides, including creative outlets. This is something near and dear to contributor Katie Elzer-Peters' heart, and I know she's excited for this story to publish—she writes about how garden centers can become a makerspace. There are so many ways to be creative with plants, and being the catalyst for that can create a deeper connection between retailers and customers, as well as between customers and plants.

Another way to create deeper connections with customers is by encouraging them to stay longer, and one way to do that is by offering food. It's a challenge in the U.S. market, but some retailers have started figuring it out, and our consultant trio behind Adapt or Die think it's an important topic to explore.

There's so much more in this issue—once again we've packed these pages full of great info. Find out about a group creating an alternative to traditional garden retail ownership, and then read about bringing joy back to garden retail (you may need either or both of these depending on how spring went). Of course, don't forget our amazing columnists and their keen insight. They are always must-reads.

As for me, it might be time to head back to my beautiful wooded patio enclave, surrounded by woodland creatures, with a great book and cup of coffee. There's not much more I can ask for in this life.

Here's to the calming power of beauty! **GP**