

## GCG's P&L, you need ideas, plus Russell's made a movie



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### COMING UP THIS WEEK:

That Was Then ...  
... This Is Now  
You Need Ideas  
For Your Other Back Pocket  
Let's Get Backyarding  
Not Just for Women  
New Plant!  
Russell's Made a Movie



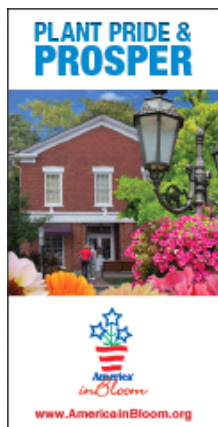
### That Was Then ...

Danny Summers, Managing Director of The Garden Center Group, sent out the results of the 17th Annual P&L Study for 2020. We are thrilled and honored to have had Danny and the Group share the info with us. And so I don't misinterpret any of the stats and numbers and such, I'm going to include (nearly) the entire press release about the results here:

*The Study, which was first conducted in 2004, has never seen the level of increases reported this year. The results were shared on March 11th during The Group's GROUPtalk LIVE Series Session during a presentation by Steve Bailey and Tim Quebedeaux of RetailKPI Consulting, The Garden Center Group's Financial Programs Managers.*

*Total Sales were reported at +25.1% over the previous year. This was a result of both Average Sale increase of +10% and Transaction Counts increase of +14%. The overall gains by all Centers reporting resulted in a new higher level of benchmarks. Past years have featured three*





levels of benchmarks: Total Group, High Achievers (net profit of 5% to 9.9%) and Best Practices (net profits above 10%). The 2020 study resulted in a new higher level of benchmarks with a 4th tier of Best of the Best being added. For instance, Total Sales for the Total Group was +25.1% increase over 2019, while the Best Practices Group reported up +28% and Best of the Best increased +30%. The Best of the Best reported the sales as a result from Average Sale increase at +5% and Transaction Counts increase at +24%.

During the presentation, Bailey and Quebedeaux shared a graph of an average Garden Center with annual sales of \$1,000,000, illustrating the growth and revenue over 17 years of the Study. You can see in the illustration the effects of the Great Recession (2009 – 2012) as well as the growth that followed, and the quantum leap in 2020. As we all know, this growth in revenues was a result of increased consumer interest in gardening during the pandemic, but interestingly amid a time when most Garden Centers were operating with unprecedented restrictions, reduced hours and less staff.



The Total Group reported a net profit of 13.6% compared to 5.6% in 2019. The Best of the Best reported a net profit of 21.3% compared to Best Practices at 14.6% in 2019. Overall, the study recognized the largest number ever of Centers being awarded Best Practices Awards.

Danny said of the report, "We expected the results to be higher than normal, but they have set a new level of benchmarks. Our P&L Study is the longest running and most comprehensive study of its kind in North America. Any Center who has participated in past years knows this for a fact. What began as a simple compilation of just a few numbers has continued to develop into a very complex and detailed benchmarking system. The average individual center's report is now 18 pages—that's not just a few numbers!"

As the 2021 season is now underway, can Garden Centers match or improve upon the results from 2020? Will both Average Sale and Transaction Counts follow patterns of 2020? With proper planning and management, there's a good chance they can. Time will tell.

Without a doubt, this annual P&L Study is a benefit to how the participating Group centers manage their operations and impacts their sales. It is the industry benchmarking system.

Not familiar with The Garden Center Group? Well, it's North America's resource for solutions for garden retailing, including benchmarking, budgeting, inventory and margins, marketing, merchandising, brand building, property and site design, human resources, team building, succession and more. This alliance of garden centers, service providers and vendors work together to create a community of professionals with one goal in mind—helping each other build successful companies. The Group focuses on business solutions designed to help garden centers increase sales, improve operations and retain more profit. For more, visit [www.thegardencentergroup.com/](http://www.thegardencentergroup.com/).



## ... This Is Now

"Learn from the past but live in the moment," is what I say. Sure, last year was a crazy-awesome year for most folks. We learned from 2020—how to take our stuff online, how to make grab-and-go kits, how to do curbside customer service, how to breathe with patience, and on and on. Now we're taking all that (and more!) and applying it to 2021. Can we do as well this year as we did last?

Early reports from southerly locales indicate consumers have kept up their interest in our products. And, surprisingly or no, this past week's AmericanHort webinar on the availability of tropicals and houseplants suggest the demand for that category is still exploding well into the time when folks normally switch over their focus to annuals and veggies. Has gardening and outdoor living become habit enough to supplant other activities once communities ease their COVID restrictions? Time will tell.

Me? I've got big plans for planting kale, transplanting my rhubarb and repotting some orchids this weekend. I'm likely not the only one. Now it's your time to tell me: How's it going so far in your region? Drop me a line about [SPRING SO FAR](#).



## You Need Ideas

Spring is coming at you fast. You need what my high school chemistry teacher Mr. Dinsmore would call "back pocket" answers. I may have one or two ideas for you to stuff in your back pocket and at the ready when the need arises.

First, I was emailing with "houseplant guru" Lisa Steinkopf about some tropical combos and she sent along this photo:





Pretty as a picture. Here's the reverse side:



Plants framed by a frame are not new. But I like the idea that the frame is attached to the wooden container. There's a bunch you could do with this idea: Sell a framed yet empty box; sell the planted boxes and cross-merch with a pile of old frames so people can select their own; or offer a (socially distanced/limited size) workshop on how to create this. Maybe it's a workshop kit with an online how-to component. I'm getting inspired just talking about it and may add this project to my weekend to-do list!



## For Your Other Back Pocket

Colleague Adriana Heikkila sent the following photo to me, which she grabbed from the Facebook page of Windy Acres Farm in Geneva, Illinois.



She had never seen a whiskey barrel planter cut lengthwise and then planted. Once you figure out how to keep it from rocking, this method sure does give you a lot more planting area.

Again, this might not be new. But it's a good reminder to think outside the box (or the barrel) and to consider alternative methods of doing common things.



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## Let's Get Backyarding

Maybe someone takes that whiskey barrel and creates a raised veggie garden in her backyard. That might make this gardener an Expert Landscaper or a Kid Zone Creator. Those are just two of the “backyarding” personality types that were recently recognized and defined by the folks at the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) and the TurfMutt Foundation. Backyarding, the groups say, is the trend of using the backyard for teleworking to relaxing and everything in between.

But first, to create the space that fits a family best and customize it to their needs, folks need to identify what type of “backyarder” they are. TurfMutt and OPEI have done some digging and came up with these types of backyard users.

**Expert Landscaper.** Your yard makes neighbors green with envy. You know how to maintain a healthy living landscape all year long, and you have the latest outdoor power equipment to make even big jobs easier. You spend the weekend doing yardwork and love the sense of accomplishment that comes from working in your yard (sounds like Bossman Beytes).

**Environmentalist.** You know that nature starts in your own backyard and that taking small steps in your yard can make a big impact on climate change.

**Nature Lover.** You cultivate a living landscape that supports a rich biodiversity with butterfly bushes, flowering plants, water sources and trees and shrubs with nooks for nesting and food.

**Horticulturist.** You consider location, maintenance, sunlight and watering requirements, as well as your climate zone and lifestyle needs, before you even think about sticking your shovel in the dirt.

**Kid Zone Creator.** You know the safest place for your kids to be is in your own backyard, and you work hard to create an outdoor fun zone they will never want to leave. A flat area of sturdy turfgrass to play sports and pitch a tent? Check. Treehouse? Check. Zipline strung safely between backyard trees? Check. An elevated garden where they can help grow the family's meals? Check.

**Pet Pamperer.** Your focus is on Fido. You've planted sturdy turfgrass like Buffalo or Bermuda that can stand up to pet play, and you've used soft foliage to create a natural barricade between "off limits" areas and the rest of the lawn. Trees and shrubs are strategically planted for shade, and you've even set up a shallow water feature to help your pup cool off on hot days.

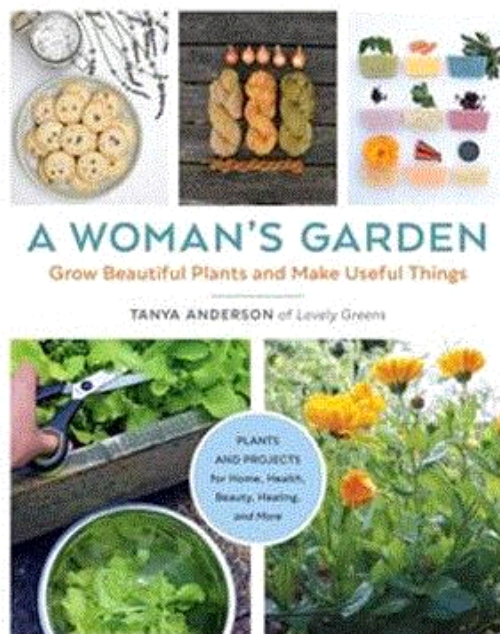
**Entertainer Extraordinaire.** Your backyard was the neighborhood hot spot long before the pandemic made that trend posh. Your yard is set up for success with patio furniture, fire pit, yard games, plenty of outdoor seating, string lights and maybe even an outdoor kitchen.

**Zen Master.** Your backyard is your sacred space for rest, relaxation and rejuvenation. You know that spending time outside is good for your health and well-being, and that thanks to your yard these benefits are only steps away.

You? You may be some or all of these. But now that you're aware of these categories, perhaps you can use them to probe your new-to-gardening customers about what type of backyard they are hoping to create.

## Not Just for Women

I don't see "homesteader" on that list above, but it could very well be. And a new book written by Tanya Anderson, the creative person behind [LovelyGreens.com](https://lovelygreens.com), fits just that category of gardener.



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The book, "A Woman's Garden: Grow beautiful plants and make useful things," shares inspiring



ways to use plants for home and health. Tanya has included growing advice and step-by-step instructions for making more than 35 skincare, dye, food, beverage, medicinal and artisan crafts. Use onion skins to dye wool! Make lavender soap! Cook up an edible flower frittata! The more I look over the table of contents, the more I'm reminded of my recently passed 103-year-old first cousin (once removed) and all the household items she would make out of necessity.

This is a [Quarto publication](#) and will publish on May 4. What a great addition to your crafting displays.

## New Plant!

My one-new-plant-in-each-*buZZ!* streak ended with my last edition because I plum forgot to include one. But I am getting back on the horse this week with a new variety from Suntory.



This is Surfinia Heavenly Cabernet. Don't you just love that color? Heavenly Cabernet features these gorgeous burgundy-purple flowers, each with a dark throat. Its habit is semi-trailing but controlled, bringing a touch of elegance wherever its used—containers, hanging baskets and landscapes. A fast grower, profuse bloomer and it's self-cleaning, too.

And considering the name and color, it's a no-brainer to create a wine garden vignette for it at retail. It'll be available for the 2022 season.

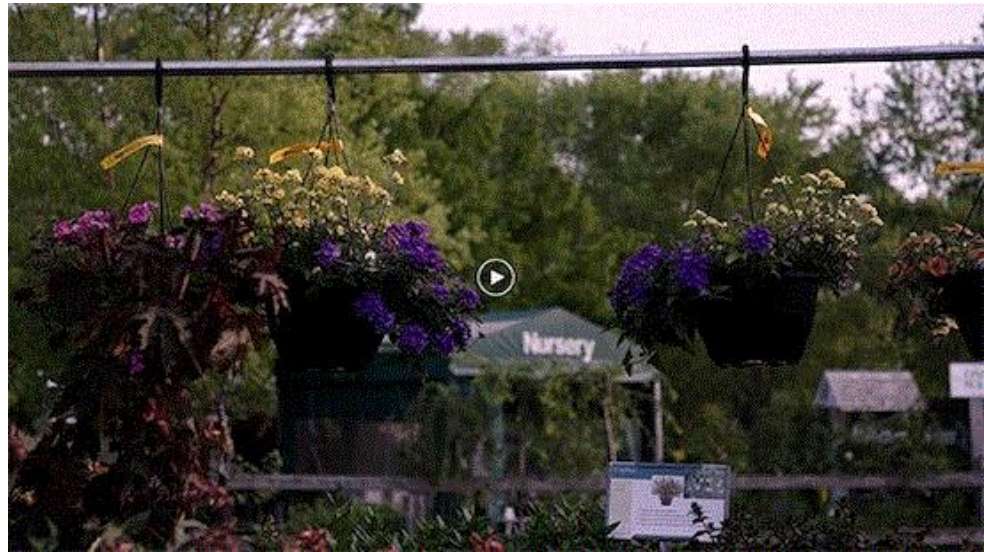
Have a new variety I can include? Send it to me at [ewells@ballpublishing.com](mailto:ewells@ballpublishing.com).

## Russell's Made a Movie

A couple weeks ago I received a call from Elizabeth Russell-Skehan, 4<sup>th</sup>-generation owner/operator of Russell's Garden Center a short distance from me in Wayland, Massachusetts. She spent the next 35 minutes relating a tale of COVID, shutdowns, re-openings, out-of-work videographers and movie industry people, new gardeners and, when all is said and done, "the fight to stay in business and create a place where the joys of gardening can be shared in-store, at curbside pick-up or delivered to customers' homes." That's how the follow-up press release I received puts it.

Aside from the videographers and movie industry, this probably sounds a lot like your Spring 2020, am I right? And thanks to those videographers, sound people, directors and family in the biz (film biz, that is), the resulting feature-length documentary film “Growing Through COVID-19,” could possibly be very familiar to you, as well.

The film was the idea of Elizabeth’s filmmaker daughter Genevieve. With film production shut down and many of her industry friend’s twiddling their thumbs at home, she decided to document the phenomenon happening at the family’s 144-year-old business. By the looks of the [TRAILER](#), her daughter and her friends are incredibly talented:



(The password to get in is russells)

Now, here’s the thing. The film isn’t quite finished, needing some more shots, some additional editing, sound and other post-production tweaking. They’re looking for some funding to finish the film, submit it to the summer film festivals and get it out in front of new gardening enthusiasts who can watch and say, “Hey, that was exactly my experience.” And maybe it’ll compel them to get them back into the garden again and again. Sponsorship opportunities begin at \$500, and you can contact Marie Winter ([mariew@russellsgc.com](mailto:mariew@russellsgc.com)) to find out how you can help. You can find out more about the film at [www.growingthroughcovid19.com](http://www.growingthroughcovid19.com).

Questions, comments, suggestions? Drop me a line if you’d like at [ewells@ballpublishing.com](mailto:ewells@ballpublishing.com).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen".

Ellen Wells



Editor-at-Large

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