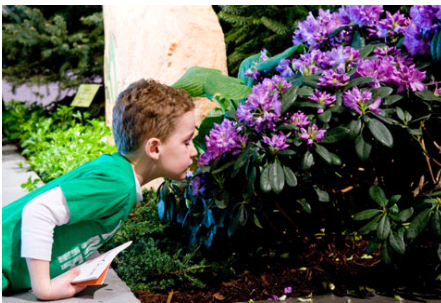


Guest Column

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The Case for Flower Shows

Mason Day



In late winter, I spent a few weeks traveling across the country visiting multiple flower shows. Big and small, different shows are happening from coast to coast, waking planters up from their winter hibernation and getting them inspired for another year.

Pictured: A young visitor tests out possible aromas at the Chicago Flower Show in March. Credit: Photo courtesy of the Chicago Flower & Garden Show.

Sadly, shows are too often overlooked by our industry and are seen as “old fashioned.” We picture attendees as grandmothers who make the trip out to the show with their local garden club. We assume that flower shows don’t really have much to offer our businesses or the consumers that attend them.

This year marked the third consecutive year that GrowIt! was the official app of the Chicago Flower & Garden Show. We made sure that every plant displayed in the show is uploaded to the app. When people had a question about what something was, or how they might be able to grow what they saw, the app provided them with the answers they needed.

We’ve traveled to other large shows as well. This year, one of our community members (@happenstantials) won a People’s Choice Award at the Northwest Flower & Garden Show and we’re always impressed with the gardens at the Philadelphia Flower Show.

After taking in the flower show scene for the last five years, I have to say: we as an industry need to change our viewpoint on the matter. Flower shows pose one of the largest opportunities for growth, and in many cases, businesses aren’t taking advantage of these events like they should be. Through collaboration, shows could become an incredible asset for the future.

Why Should You Invest in Flower Shows?

The “M” Word—For better or for worse, we’re obsessed with Millennials. We want to know how they think and how they act. What do they like? For everything we’ve learned, we still must not understand them or else we would be putting more efforts into being involved with flower shows. Millennials LIVE FOR experiences. These shows let Millennials live out their plant fantasies. Flower shows offer a non-intimidating (which is important) way for younger people to cultivate their interest in growing things. Couple that with the fact that new home sales hit a 10-year high in

November and you can see why they're looking for ideas. Plus, these events usually have booze and food—two things that are necessary for catching the elusive Millennial.



Pictured: Flower shows attract visitors of all ages, including Millennials and their families, as a plant experience they can't get anywhere else. Credit: Photo courtesy of the Chicago Flower & Garden Show.

New Varieties—By the time a “new” variety reaches a consumer, it’s most likely old news for you and me. We go to Spring Trials, we see the new varieties displayed at Cultivate and we read culture reports in all of the magazines. When it comes to consumers, that’s not the case. If you’re not making sure that your new varieties are making an appearance at any of the national or local flower and garden shows, how are you making sure that people will see your products in action? Seeing something in a catalog is one thing, but people want to know how it’s going to look in a space, and that’s something that isn’t really found anywhere besides a public garden or a garden show. Even if you’re a grower, is there a way to get plants into a show’s gardens that you know your retailers are going to be carrying this spring? Set them (and yourself) up for success.

Know Before It’s Too Late—If you do nothing else, I encourage you to take a field trip to your nearest flower and garden show. Shows act as a precursor to our busy season. They give people inspiration and also clue them in on things that might not pan out. **HARNESS THIS!** What can you learn from show visitors? What products were people most interested in? What themes seemed to be the most popular? Are edibles still a trend? By listening in on conversations, checking out display gardens and asking consumers questions, you’ll be better prepared when those same consumers come walking through your doors (or your customers’) in May.

That’s really just a taste of what flower and garden shows have to offer, and more than anything, shows are a platform for you to reach more local consumers. As an industry here in the U.S. we’ve barely scratched the surface when it comes to utilizing events like this to take things to the next level.

We would encourage everyone to check out their local show and find a way to get more involved. **GP**

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