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Doubling Down on Plants

Jennifer Polanz



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Turning the calendar to January 2020 brings us a new year, a new decade and a renewed focus on what drives this industry: plants. We're seeing a continued resurgence of interest in all types of plants, from the houseplant craze that defies generational boundaries to fruits and veggies that encourage wellness to plants that have multiple functions in the landscape and even those that can help slow climate change (trees, I'm looking at you).

It was clear after seeing the numbers from the most successful garden centers in the country at the recent Garden Center Group Event in Nashville that plants continue to remain the most profitable aspect of a garden center. This year, you'll see even more from us on this front, from new introductions to a greater focus on profitability in the annuals, perennials, trees & shrubs, and houseplants departments.

In fact, you'll see a collaboration within these pages and online between Senior Editor Bill Calkins and Garden Center Group's Steve Bailey (who acts as the Financial Tracking Officer for the group). They'll be working together to highlight how to take a deep dive into your profitability, set up benchmarks by which to measure your progress and take a category-level look at how to improve profitability.

Also new this year are changes to our editorial calendar (that's a fancy way of saying what topics we cover every month). We're changing it up a bit to feature houseplants in our May issue and a wealth of even more new varieties in our July issue.

You don't have to wait until July, though, to see what's new. We tapped our resident expert Dr. Matthew Chappell to give us a rundown on what's new in flowering shrubs for the landscape. These workhorses have multiple jobs, too.

Ellen Wells, meanwhile, talked to multiple design specialists to find out how to maximize space in smaller landscapes. You can also find out what gig Ellen took this fall to maximize her free time (hint: it has something to do with weed whackers and dump trucks).

Plants are most often the reason people get into this business (only rarely do I meet someone who could sell anything and they just happen to sell plants—most start with the plants part). Whether you're looking to get in or get out, we have just the series of stories for you, starting with this month. Columnist and business expert Bill McCurry (who has personal experience in this realm), starts a multi-part series this month on buying and selling a business.

And, finally, the story that may entice you to increase your prices this year on all these plants we're talking about: our annual Wage & Benefit Survey analysis. Many thanks to those who took the time to fill out the survey—we appreciate your help in providing this information to the masses. See a breakdown of pay rates and benefits, as well as hear suggestions for improving those help-wanted ads. **GP**