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The Comfort of Nostalgia

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In times of crisis, there's something really comforting in going back to a time that seemed like less stress and more fun. Picking up old hobbies, rewatching your favorite sitcom (hence why we're in Season 2 of "Scrubs" as I write this) or even digging out those old baseball or Pokemon cards.

It's something we can emphasize in the garden center, too. Planters that look like Baby Groot from "Guardians of the Galaxy" or Bulbasaur from Pokemon would bring a lot of joy to fans looking for a hit of a happier time.

If you want to go back even further, mid-century modern (what used to just be old stuff from the 1950s) is super trendy at the moment. And, of course, we can keep playing up the 1970s houseplant style with macramé and even the colors avocado green and harvest gold.

We're in the midst of a difficult winter and these are the things that help. I'm not the only one who thinks this, either. In July, National Geographic ran a story about how nostalgia can help us cope during the pandemic. The author cites the resurgence in drive-in theater attendance, which both meets the moment of watching movies socially distanced and ticks that nostalgia box.

"I believe many are turning to nostalgia, even if they do not consciously realize it, as a stabilizing force and a way to keep in mind what they cherish most," Clay Routledge, a psychology professor at North Dakota State University, tells the story's author.

Plants can bring back that nostalgia, too, from your mother's favorite African violets to your grandmother's hollyhocks. Canning and preserving is a practical way to scratch that nostalgic itch, as well.

The story notes, though, there's a danger in becoming too immersed in recreating nostalgic moments. There's a still a future ahead to look toward and hopefully in the coming year we'll see the last receding moments of COVID-19 and more social activity taking its place.

In that vein of looking ahead, we're starting a new monthly feature for 2021 in our Retail Best Practices series. Each month, we'll profile a different garden center that takes part in The Garden Center Group Annual P&L Study and has achieved Best Practices designation. That means 10% or greater profitability. We'll home in on one item each month that the garden center does really well, and hopefully, it will spark some new ideas for all of you. A special thanks to The Garden Center Group for their help in putting this series together!

You're looking ahead to 2021, as well, and trying to plan for staffing. It's tricky business and you told us all about it in this year's Wage & Benefit Survey.

Also in this issue you'll find some inspiration for helping customers who are tired of mowing all that grass to find new ways to re-imagine their landscape. Once they reconfigure their landscape, they're going to need to water it. Find out more about key elements to a watering and irrigation department.

And finally, in the age of COVID, of course we had to have a virtual retail tour. AmericanHort took on the challenge and loaded up the virtual coach to take us around the world. You can find ideas from those four garden centers.

As we start off this new year, I hope you, your family and your staff have been able to stay safe and healthy. May it continue through the rest of 2021. **GP**