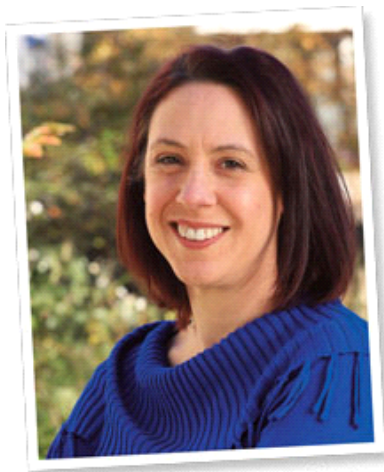


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## The Cheering Section

*Jennifer Polanz*



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Over the years I've gotten pretty good at being the cheering section. With two kids in sports, albeit fairly non-traditional ones, I've held my breath and then burst into applause through individual and team ice skating competitions (synchronized skating—it's the coolest sport you've probably never heard of and one you should definitely check out) and years of karate testing sessions.

At first I was a smidge disappointed no one wanted to follow in my footsteps as a volleyball player, but now I'm grateful they excel in sports I know nothing about. It makes it so much easier to just cheer them on raucously. That axel? Looked great to me! That axe kick? Wicked, dude. Can you tell I'm a proud mama?

This May issue is where I stand aside and become the cheering section for all of you. This year has presented new challenges for garden retailers and growers everywhere, and if the early demand is any indication, it's going to be another crazy, busy spring (and summer ... and fall ... and maybe holiday, too). In a bit I'll tell you about some helpful stories we have in this issue to help with messaging and spark some creative thinking for the rest of the season, but right now I just want you to know that we're behind you all the way.

Picture the Ball Publishing staff (though we're a small team, we can be pretty darn loud when we want to be) cheering all of you on, whether you're a big operation or a mom-and-pop; grower, retailer or manufacturer; we're rooting for all of you to succeed. You're not only employing people and beautifying the world, but you're making people's lives better and healthier. You are truly doing essential work.

We should all pass some of that cheering on to the new gardeners, too, who are hesitantly picking up a trowel for the first time. They need the encouragement of a full marching band and color guard to keep them motivated. Let them know how proud of them you are that they took such a leap into gardening and make sure they know it's a lifelong pursuit that doesn't end when they inevitably kill that first plant. Or second or ... you know what I mean.

Now, on to this issue, which is bursting with new varieties and how to use them. First off, we heard from retailers who said houseplants have been difficult to get this year (and likely beyond), so we talked to breeders about garden options that make great indoor plants, too. See which new varieties your customers might want to add to their jungalow this year.

Contributor Katie Elzer-Peters gives us a glimpse at unique ways to market and sell houseplants, which could spark

some creative thinking and higher price points. Then Ellen Wells is back (you didn't think we'd let her loose without bringing her back for The Houseplants Issue, did you?)! She tackles a topic right in her wheelhouse: tropical plants in outdoor combinations. You won't want to miss some of these gorgeous combos.

Two other items I'd like to note: Bill McCurry has put in his due diligence to research current and impending shortages; also a quick reminder that our freelancer Ann-Marie Vazzano has been doing a wonderful job profiling members of The Garden Center Group each month.

We'll keep on cheering you until the last customer leaves (inevitably 20 minutes after closing time) and we'll be first in line to pour you a cold one once the door locks. **GP**