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## Building on the Momentum

*Jennifer Polanz*



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There seem to be multiple entry points into gardening for the first time (or at least, gardening on your own for the first time if you grew up with family who gardened).

Those entry points include either gardening for food, gardening for flowers or houseplants. This issue in particular is about edibles, and there's lots of opportunity regardless of which entry point people come in from to convert customers to edibles gardens (along with either flower gardens or houseplants). I'm certainly not advocating replacing one with another; rather, there's lots of room for encouraging enjoyment of growing all types of plants.

In fact, a new consumer survey from Axiom on 2022 gardening habits \*just\* hit my inbox as I was writing this and one statistic in particular stood out: when asked what types of gardening projects consumers were likely to

complete for 2022, creating vegetable gardens came in No. 1 with 54% of respondents affirming their plans for more edibles.

I really think this is a key point to building on the success of the last two years. Statistically, you have a better chance to improve profit through an increase in customer retention. If a customer had success last year (or, if you can provide the solution to the problem they had last year so they have better success this year), they're far more likely to return in the spring. At that point, there's an opportunity to expand their interests—and purchases—through education like hands-on workshops or on-demand videos highlighting other ways to garden.

The point-of-sale system becomes a major player in this, too. If a customer's purchase fell into the mainly flowers category, why not send them marketing material promoting beautiful edibles to include this year? If they did lots of container gardening, work in the patio edibles and easy containers like Earthboxes that have become popular. Don't forget to include the necessary accessories to get started with edibles, from trellises and supports to fertilizers and soil amendments.

In this month's cover story, my colleague Jennifer Zurko and I take a look at new edibles varieties, many of which would work in those patio containers or other tight spaces. These varieties also are bred for consumer success, many with increased disease resistance and greater yield. Then I asked some of the seed packet companies for an update on what they think 2022 will look like, as well as a rundown on some of the new edibles they have for consumers next year.

Whether they're buying edibles, flowers or houseplants, customers are changing the way they connect with the retailers they love (i.e., you!). Katie Elzer-Peters provides us a high-level viewpoint of how much retail has changed and how retailers need to rethink where they meet their customers (hint: there's a couch involved).

And, finally, I'd like to highlight Bill McCurry's column this month, which invokes a quote from one of my all-time favorite movies, and in the process, gives us all a lot to think about heading into 2022.

There will be challenges facing our industry in the coming year, but there's also incredible enthusiasm around plants and gardening. If we continue to be the messengers of the benefits of plants (as there are many), I'm hopeful customers will continue to come back for more and will be hooked for life! **GP**