

Features

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Hiring More, Paying More

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This year to say retailers struggled to find the help they needed to meet the insatiable consumer demand for plants is an understatement. That struggle is reflected in these statistics, too, showing hourly and salaried pay went up around the country in multiple employee positions. These numbers also show retailers hired more staff last year than they had in 2020 to meet that demand and many are planning to hire even more this year.

So how are they going to attract that talent? In last month's cover story for the Style issue, I talked with Suzanne Kludt, owner of [HireHorticulture.com](https://www.hirehorticulture.com), a company that helps place horticulture workers and recruit for horticulture companies. During our discussion, she talked about strategies that worked to retain employees and attract new. Many of those related to helping employees feel safe at work, which meant offering PPE, paid sick and quarantine days and staying bonuses.

"If someone was sick or through contact tracing was exposed to COVID and quarantined for a period, they were paid," she says. "We saw that more on the wholesale side than on the retail side, but I wish they would have seen that and taken advantage of that.

"They got a lot of loyalty out of that—those employees are sticking through and showing up."

Retailers had to get creative with their offerings to keep employees, which meant everything from take-home dinners on Friday nights for a busy maintenance crew and Saturday breakfasts for retail staff to gift cards for positive customer interactions, new training opportunities, annual bonuses (sometimes surprise bonuses) and even free groceries. Statistically, we saw increased offerings in bonuses, health insurance, sick days and paid vacation days in the survey. Read on for more ways retailers attracted new talent and kept existing hard workers.

"We have had the most success with flexible hours. We have students and moms that could get paid more elsewhere, but we bend over backwards to meet their needs. Other places don't offer that."—Tennessee retailer

"Bonus pay in March for returning employees based on earnings of the company for the prior year. One-third of profits go to this plan."—Massachusetts retailer

"No/limited winter layoffs. Regular reviews with raises based on benchmarks."—Pennsylvania grower-retailer

“Monthly staff appreciation events. Food truck and breakfast off-site with a staff meeting. Gift cards for excellent service. ‘Way to go’ board where customer compliments are posted for all to read. Posted monthly goals with daily sales posted. Bonuses after a really hard month like May. Flexible schedule where we look at each staff member’s quality of life and their personal needs.”—Ohio retailer

“Referral program through employees: \$250 for laborers, \$500 for foreman. (We) have paid out over \$6K this year with 80% retention.”—Idaho retailer

“Plant discount is the best way to attract new seasonal staff—usually former customers. Extra gift cards are a nice bonus also.”—Illinois grower-retailer

“Involve the staff in community fundraisers. We sponsored an event at the garden center that raised over \$110,000 the team got us ready for.”—Arizona retailer

“Long-term staff can choose the department they want to work in during the busy season. After so many years, the employee discount increases and non-salaried staff can accumulate extra hours, which go towards extra paid vacation time.”—Alberta, Canada retailer

Comparison

United States and Canada

HOURLY EMPLOYEES (per hour)

United States

	\$7.01-\$8.50	\$8.51-\$10.00	\$10.01-\$12.50	\$12.51-\$15.00	\$15.01-\$17.50	More than \$17.50
Temp/Seasonal General Labor	2%	9%	30%	31%	22%	6%
Part-time General Labor	1%	6%	27%	38%	23%	6%
Full-time General Labor	1%	1%	9%	31%	35%	23%
Head Cashier	1%	2%	10%	31%	34%	21%
Temporary Cashier	1%	7%	38%	28%	23%	3%

Canada

Temp/Seasonal General Labor	0%	0%	8%	42%	50%	0%
Part-time General Labor	0%	0%	0%	50%	40%	10%
Full-time General Labor	0%	0%	0%	33%	33%	33%
Head Cashier	0%	0%	0%	40%	20%	40%
Temporary Cashier	0%	0%	0%	60%	40%	0%

SALARY EMPLOYEES (per year)

United States

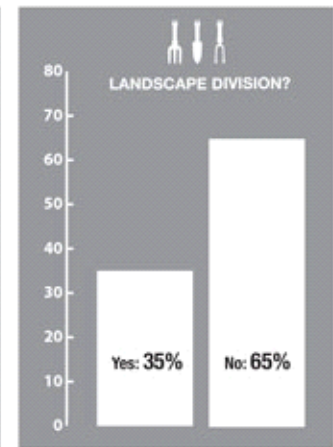
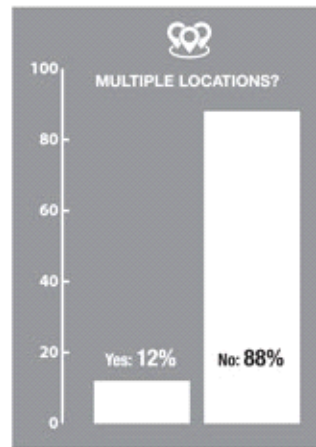
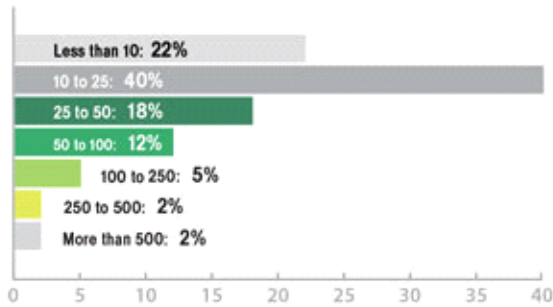
	Less than \$20,000	\$20,000-\$30,000	\$30,000-\$40,000	\$40,000-\$50,000	\$50,000-\$60,000	\$60,000-\$70,000	\$70,000-\$80,000	\$80,000-\$90,000	\$90,000-\$100,000	More than \$100,000
Buyer	2%	8%	29%	31%	14%	6%	6%	2%	2%	2%
Floral Designer	10%	23%	26%	26%	16%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Landscape Designer	6%	3%	12%	15%	29%	15%	9%	9%	3%	0%
Landscape Foreman	6%	0%	28%	17%	28%	17%	6%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandiser	11%	11%	26%	35%	17%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandise Mgr.	0%	5%	21%	32%	21%	13%	8%	0%	0%	0%
General Manager	3%	3%	10%	19%	18%	13%	16%	9%	3%	6%
Garden Center Mgr.	3%	3%	17%	20%	29%	14%	9%	5%	2%	0%
Department Mgr.	3%	7%	30%	20%	25%	5%	3%	3%	2%	2%
Owner	6%	7%	2%	7%	12%	10%	6%	7%	12%	28%

Canada

Buyer	0%	0%	33%	0%	17%	33%	17%	0%	0%	0%
Floral Designer	0%	0%	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Landscape Designer	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Landscape Foreman	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%
Merchandiser	0%	0%	25%	25%	25%	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandise Mgr.	0%	0%	25%	0%	50%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%
General Manager	0%	0%	25%	12%	12%	12%	0%	12%	12%	12%
Garden Center Mgr.	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%
Department Mgr.	0%	0%	20%	40%	0%	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Owner	0%	0%	20%	10%	10%	20%	0%	10%	0%	30%

The value between the U.S. and Canadian dollar is about a 20-cent difference. Because of space constraints, we're not showing both.

Employees At Peak Season

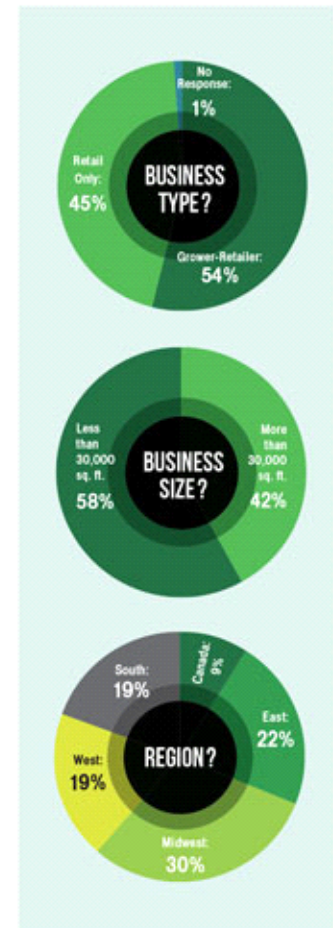


Benefits Offered

	Full-Time	Part-Time
401(k)	38%	8%
Pension	2%	0%
Bonus	59%	32%
Health Insurance	44%	6%
Dental Insurance	29%	5%
Life Insurance	15%	2%
Sick Days	48%	16%
Disability	20%	2%
Paid Vacation	72%	18%
Paid Holidays	55%	14%

When U.S. survey takers were asked which benefits their employees consider most important*, paid vacation time (53%), health insurance (41%) and annual bonuses (35%) topped the respondents' lists. For Canadian respondents, paid vacation was the most important benefit (42%), followed by a tie for second with annual bonuses and paid holidays (33% each).

*Survey takers were asked to check all benefits that apply.



Staffing Changes

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Add Staff	26%	31%	29%	29%	40%	47%
Reduce Staff	5%	3%	2%	3%	4%	2%
Keep Same	62%	58%	61%	62%	46%	44%
I Don't Know	6%	8%	8%	6%	10%	7%

Breakdown By Size

HOURLY EMPLOYEES (per hour)

	\$7.01- \$8.50	\$8.51- \$10.00	\$10.01- \$12.50	\$12.51- \$15.00	\$15.01- \$17.50	More than \$17.50
Under 30,000 Sq. Ft.						
Temp/Seasonal General Labor	1%	8%	28%	34%	23%	5%
Part-time General Labor	2%	5%	21%	40%	21%	11%
Full-time General Labor	2%	2%	10%	31%	36%	21%
Head Cashier	2%	4%	14%	32%	32%	18%
Temporary Cashier	2%	7%	37%	33%	18%	4%
Over 30,000 Sq. Ft.						
Temp/Seasonal General Labor	2%	8%	28%	30%	26%	6%
Part-time General Labor	0%	6%	29%	37%	29%	0%
Full-time General Labor	0%	0%	6%	33%	35%	27%
Head Cashier	0%	0%	4%	33%	35%	29%
Temporary Cashier	0%	6%	32%	28%	32%	2%

SALARY EMPLOYEES (per year)

Under 30,000 Sq. Ft.

	Less than \$20,000	\$20,000- \$30,000	\$30,000- \$40,000	\$40,000- \$50,000	\$50,000- \$60,000	\$60,000- \$70,000	\$70,000- \$80,000	\$80,000- \$90,000	\$90,000- \$100,000	More than \$100,000
Buyer	3%	11%	26%	37%	9%	9%	3%	0%	3%	0%
Floral Designer	9%	23%	41%	9%	18%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Landscape Designer	6%	6%	12%	12%	44%	6%	6%	6%	0%	0%
Landscape Foreman	5%	0%	42%	16%	21%	0%	11%	5%	0%	0%
Merchandiser	16%	12%	28%	28%	12%	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandise Mgr.	0%	6%	33%	17%	33%	11%	0%	0%	0%	0%
General Manager	5%	5%	12%	30%	20%	12%	5%	5%	2%	2%
Garden Center Mgr.	3%	7%	27%	23%	23%	7%	3%	3%	3%	0%
Department Mgr.	6%	6%	39%	16%	19%	6%	0%	3%	0%	3%
Owner	8%	12%	8%	12%	13%	13%	2%	6%	12%	15%

Over 30,000 Sq. Ft.

Buyer	0%	3%	33%	19%	19%	8%	11%	3%	0%	3%
Floral Designer	7%	14%	14%	57%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Landscape Designer	5%	0%	10%	20%	20%	20%	10%	10%	5%	0%
Landscape Foreman	5%	0%	11%	21%	32%	32%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandiser	4%	8%	24%	40%	24%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandise Mgr.	0%	4%	12%	37%	17%	17%	12%	0%	0%	0%
General Manager	0%	0%	11%	6%	14%	14%	25%	14%	6%	11%
Garden Center Mgr.	2%	0%	12%	15%	30%	17%	17%	5%	0%	0%
Department Mgr.	0%	6%	21%	26%	26%	9%	6%	3%	3%	0%
Owner	3%	0%	0%	3%	10%	8%	10%	10%	10%	46%

Breakdown

By Region

HOURLY
EMPLOYEES
(per hour)

	\$7.01- \$8.50	\$8.51- \$10.00	\$10.01- \$12.50	\$12.51- \$15.00	\$15.01- \$17.50	More than \$17.50
East						
Temp/Seasonal General Labor	4%	11%	25%	29%	32%	0%
Part-time General Labor	0%	4%	26%	35%	35%	0%
Full-time General Labor	0%	0%	8%	28%	40%	24%
Head Cashier	0%	5%	9%	27%	32%	27%
Temporary Cashier	0%	9%	36%	18%	32%	5%
Midwest						
Temp/Seasonal General Labor	3%	8%	37%	42%	3%	8%
Part-time General Labor	3%	6%	30%	49%	6%	6%
Full-time General Labor	3%	0%	6%	37%	34%	20%
Head Cashier	3%	0%	13%	37%	37%	10%
Temporary Cashier	3%	3%	45%	42%	3%	3%
South						
Temp/Seasonal General Labor	0%	12%	48%	24%	8%	8%
Part-time General Labor	0%	9%	39%	39%	13%	0%
Full-time General Labor	0%	4%	17%	44%	26%	9%
Head Cashier	0%	5%	18%	41%	18%	18%
Temporary Cashier	0%	18%	50%	23%	9%	0%
West						
Temp/Seasonal General Labor	0%	5%	5%	23%	59%	9%
Part-time General Labor	0%	4%	8%	25%	46%	17%
Full-time General Labor	0%	0%	5%	10%	43%	43%
Head Cashier	0%	0%	0%	14%	52%	33%
Temporary Cashier	0%	0%	14%	24%	57%	5%

SALARY EMPLOYEES (per year)

	Less than \$20,000	\$20,000-\$30,000	\$30,000-\$40,000	\$40,000-\$50,000	\$50,000-\$60,000	\$60,000-\$70,000	\$70,000-\$80,000	\$80,000-\$90,000	\$90,000-\$100,000	More than \$100,000
East										
Buyer	0%	0%	55%	18%	18%	0%	9%	0%	0%	0%
Floral Designer	17%	0%	50%	17%	17%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Landscape Designer	14%	0%	14%	14%	29%	0%	14%	14%	0%	0%
Landscape Foreman	11%	0%	33%	11%	22%	11%	11%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandiser	11%	11%	44%	22%	11%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandise Mgr.	0%	0%	33%	33%	22%	0%	11%	0%	0%	0%
General Manager	0%	0%	7%	13%	33%	13%	27%	7%	0%	0%
Garden Center Mgr.	7%	0%	33%	13%	33%	0%	13%	0%	0%	0%
Department Mgr.	0%	0%	23%	15%	46%	8%	8%	0%	0%	0%
Owner	0%	5%	5%	5%	14%	14%	10%	14%	10%	24%

Midwest

Buyer	5%	10%	24%	29%	19%	0%	10%	5%	0%	0%
Floral Designer	7%	33%	27%	20%	13%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Landscape Designer	9%	0%	9%	27%	27%	9%	9%	9%	0%	0%
Landscape Foreman	11%	0%	22%	22%	22%	22%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandiser	14%	14%	14%	36%	21%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandise Mgr.	0%	8%	0%	42%	17%	17%	17%	0%	0%	0%
General Manager	5%	0%	18%	27%	9%	9%	9%	9%	5%	9%
Garden Center Mgr.	6%	0%	11%	17%	28%	17%	17%	6%	0%	0%
Department Mgr.	5%	5%	26%	26%	16%	11%	5%	0%	0%	5%
Owner	10%	7%	0%	13%	13%	3%	3%	7%	10%	33%

South

Buyer	0%	16%	26%	37%	5%	5%	0%	0%	5%	5%
Floral Designer	20%	20%	0%	40%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Landscape Designer	0%	14%	14%	14%	43%	0%	14%	0%	0%	0%
Landscape Foreman	0%	0%	50%	12%	25%	12%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandiser	17%	17%	33%	25%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandise Mgr.	0%	12%	37%	37%	12%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
General Manager	7%	13%	13%	20%	7%	20%	0%	7%	7%	7%
Garden Center Mgr.	0%	14%	14%	21%	21%	21%	0%	0%	7%	0%
Department Mgr.	6%	12%	47%	18%	12%	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%
Owner	13%	7%	7%	0%	20%	0%	7%	0%	27%	20%

West

Buyer	0%	0%	15%	38%	15%	23%	8%	0%	0%	0%
Floral Designer	0%	0%	25%	50%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Landscape Designer	0%	0%	12%	0%	12%	50%	0%	12%	12%	0%
Landscape Foreman	0%	0%	11%	22%	33%	22%	11%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandiser	0%	0%	10%	60%	30%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Merchandise Mgr.	0%	0%	12%	12%	37%	37%	0%	0%	0%	0%
General Manager	0%	0%	0%	7%	27%	13%	33%	13%	0%	7%
Garden Center Mgr.	0%	0%	11%	28%	28%	17%	6%	11%	0%	0%
Department Mgr.	0%	10%	10%	20%	40%	0%	0%	10%	10%	0%
Owner	0%	8%	0%	8%	0%	23%	8%	8%	8%	38%