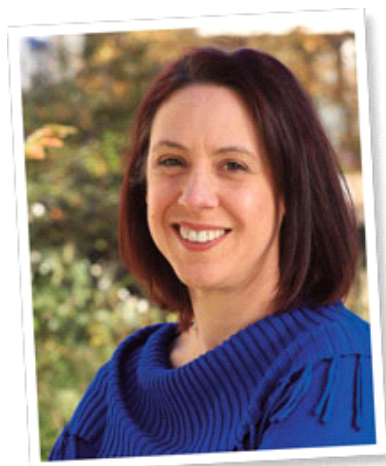


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The Right Tools

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Over the years, I've curated a personal selection of my favorite tools for gardening. Ratcheting hand pruners for day-to-day pruning. Loppers with long handles for most other tougher trimming jobs. A sturdy garden trowel and tough garden gloves. These are my go-tos for just about every job.

Every job has a set of tools that make it easier and more efficient, and the job of retail is no exception. It's fortuitous that this issue has the theme of tools and equipment because we're sensing a change in the economic climate coming up and you're going to need all the tools in your toolbox to thrive.

Yes, thrive. Not survive. I recently read an excellent blog post from industry consultant Sid Raisch about the potential for recession and how he's decided he will not be participating and why. You can find it by visiting www.thegardencentergroup.com and clicking on Sid's name under "The

People."

We have more tools than ever to combat a changing economy and it's all in how we use them that defines what the next year or so will look like. During our recent webinar with our Young Retailer Award finalists, they talked about changing shopper habits and how it's clear more are coming in during weekdays. We have point-of-sale data that shows when people are shopping that can help set labor hours to shore up those Wage & Benefit stats. Dig into that data. You may find you need to close earlier or change your hours to meet the needs of your customers. You may even want to consider closing for periods of time versus staying open year-round. Look at the math.

POS data can also help you determine your top sellers and your bottom feeders. The last two years it was all anyone could do to keep inventory stocked. Now, it's time to look at the numbers and see what needs to go. More of the profitable stuff, less of the dust-covered product that's sitting.

Think about add-on sales. What profitable categories can you expand with accessories and specialty products to entice a higher ticket? What does your market want? Are you experiencing lots of home sales or a cooling off period? Changes in your housing market can change your offerings.

That leads me to how we can help. In this issue, we have a couple of options to move the needle. One is edibles. In times of economic hardship, people revert to homegrown food. We now have more options than ever for small-space and patio gardens, including the star of our cover, Peppers from Heaven, a new line of hanging basket peppers from Burpee. Turn to page 22 to see more options you can entice customers with, and then don't forget the

add-on sales of specialty fertilizer, controls and plant supports to help them be successful.

Of course we've got tools and I talked to a couple of garden-focused companies to get their thoughts on positioning garden needs. It comes down to being trusted in your community as the expert. Check out new options for your customers and staff.

We already know we don't have a lot of time to attract a customer's attention with a display, but did you know it's mere seconds? Dr. Bridget Behe breaks down the science of how customers "read" displays so you can have more effective merchandising.

And, finally, don't miss Bill McCurry's column, where he starts with a column he wrote in 2008 and then finds the lessons from the past we need to take to heart now.

Find the tools you need to thrive in the next economic cycle and spend time preparing for what's coming. Then take a deep breath and show off those big, beautiful blooms, foliage and fruit that they keep coming back for. **GP**