

Features

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Create an Indoor Oasis

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The houseplant boom continues, causing retailers to look for new ways to reach consumers. During the pandemic, people looked for ways to improve their homes, leading to scores of new gardeners creating their own indoor oasis. Many consumers hope to develop indoor spaces that promote healthy plants and provide aesthetic value in their homes. Our industry can use this trend to offer accessories that enhance the indoor growing experience.

A New Type of Warrior

As houseplant sales increase, so does our need to solve problems. New gardeners are willing to spend their money on plants, so let's do our best to make their experience fun. You're likely aware that overwatering is a significant cause of houseplant decline and death. This problem is often caused by poor soil or attempts to overcare for plants. A standard method to address this problem is adding rocks or other debris in the bottom of pots, but this causes the water table to be raised, resulting in waterlogged soil around the roots.

Taunya Miller lives in the Pacific Northwest, a place known for precipitation. After college, she moved to her own place, growing veggies and houseplants in containers. Each year she encountered the same problem: waterlogged soil. Her friends in the mountains dealt with the same issue, so she began looking for a solution.

I spoke with Taunya about her attempts to develop a product that would provide oxygen to the soil: "So I just started doing my own research and testing, and after a few prototypes and two successful seasons, I decided to go ahead and launch The Plant Warrior Company."

The main product sold by The Plant Warrior Company is the Root Warrior, a uniquely shaped device that's placed in the bottom of pots. The product creates a pocket of air in the central portion of the soil, a location known as "the dead zone." In this space, harmful bacteria often form because of water saturation.



The Root Warrior is designed to balance the plant's water and oxygen needs. The device contains two reservoirs holding a certain amount of water and an overflow section to remove excess water. The sides of the Root Warrior feature numerous vertical openings, allowing air to flow unobstructed into the dead zone. Upon seeing the unusual design, I asked Taunya if it was difficult to promote such a different product type.

"I think the biggest challenge was educating people on how it worked, why it worked and how they use it. Education is definitely key," she said.

Pictured: The Plant Warrior

Along with consumers, retailers were intrigued by the product. Taunya said, "They asked many questions on how it would help their customer base and why they should carry it. Once they got the knowledge around it, I

started getting much [more] support."

On The Plant Warrior's website, you can find information about the product's science and engineering. Taunya also sends a brochure with the device to help consumers use and understand The Root Warrior. She added her customers are using the product for various houseplants and herbs. Because the product comes in multiple sizes, consumers can use it in containers of any size.

A Brighter Solution

While water is one challenge, light is another common source of frustration, as consumers often have limited light in their home. Polly and Victor McGann are the owners of Happy Leaf LED, a business dedicated to providing state-of-the-art grow lights. Victor came from an engineering background, allowing him to stay current on the latest technology advancements in solid-state lighting. His passion for engineering and plants led him to develop advanced grow lights that could surpass existing ones and provide better plants for consumers. For several years, Victor worked with a professor at Purdue to study grow lights and look for ways to develop them beyond their existing capabilities. In 2016, Polly and Victor began their grow light business, offering commercial quality lights to consumers.

As you know, various grow lights are available to consumers, so I asked Polly to explain how they differentiate themselves from the larger companies.

"We're not pushing out massive numbers of grow lights. Instead, we're able to build in relatively small batches, so that means we can really keep our technology current. If you've looked at grow lights online, there's a flood, there's an unending supply," Polly said. "If you dig into the details on them, you're going to find a lot of them don't have the most current technology and LEDs are constantly evolving."



Many of their customers use the lights to grow food year-round, but they also use them for houseplants. Certain plants—like citrus, palms and succulents—are gaining popularity among consumers, reinforcing the need for quality lighting. Polly and Victor post videos and other resources on their website to educate their customers on grow lights, along with customer testimonials.

Victor showed me a chart demonstrating how different amounts of red, blue and green light affect lettuce quality, and the results are astonishing. In terms of repeat customers, Polly noted, “We have a really high ratio of people coming back for more lights once they’ve seen what they could do.”

Pictured: Happy Leaf LED and Treleaf



Unique Aesthetics

For many consumers, growing houseplants is more than just caring for plants. They also want plants to improve the aesthetics of their home. I spoke with Zeba Parker, owner of Treleaf, to learn how she’s helping consumers create beauty using trellises. She began her business during the height of COVID, and like many consumers, she wanted to improve the look of her home.

“I am a houseplant enthusiast. I’ve been a gardener for almost a decade and have a hundred plants inside my home,” she explained. “I always try to integrate them with my home décor, but what happened was during COVID, you’re home more, and I was trying to revamp my spaces and get my plants to look nicer.”

For Zeba, she wanted support for many of her vining plants. She tried staking them and using other types of support, but had little success.

With her engineering background, Zeba designed a wooden board to be used as a trellis, adding finer details to the design. After some trial and error, she began a collection of trellises for herself and posted pictures of them on Instagram.

“That basically took off. More people asked me, where did you buy that from? And I made some more for my friends and then friends of friends.” As the product grew in popularity, Zeba created a brand name and Treleaf was born.

The leaf-shaped trellises look right at home in planters and are functional for various plants. A few species used by her customers are pothos, hoyas and philodendrons. Zeba uses a laser to make the trellis, allowing her to work efficiently and create various shapes and sizes. The wood is a unique part of the trellises.

Zeba said, “It goes with the plant theme compared to the other traditional trellises that are metal or plastic, which does not look as organic as the wood.”

Treleaf offers various plant-themed supports that can be used for plants or décor.

A Look Ahead

Consumers are changing how they interact with houseplants. I asked Zeba if she noticed any trends and she said, “We are seeing a trend of consumers having planned rooms with dedicated space for plants, like 50 plants on two

or three shelves. People are becoming collectors of plants.

“The trend is more herbs and more of the green year-round,” she added.

As an industry, we’re seeing younger generations interested in gardening, especially with houseplants. Consumers live in places with limited space, making it essential for us to adapt to their needs and make gardening easier.

Moving forward, let’s strive to produce creative solutions. **GP**

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