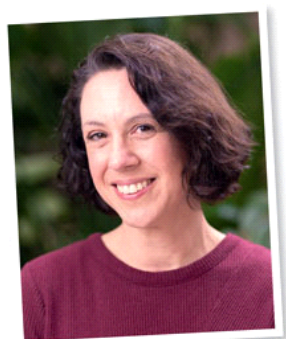


5/1/2024

## May is a Mixed Bag

Jennifer Polanz



Jennifer Polanz

I've been in this industry long enough to know this month tests even the strongest of mettle. You live and die by the weather (mostly), and try to hustle hard enough to keep things in the black the rest of the year, or however long you're open for.

Depending on where you are in the country, you have to hold back customers from making costly mistakes ("No, ma'am, you cannot plant those tomatoes May 1 in Cleveland, and you might as well come back for those caladium bulbs unless you just want to look at the bulb itself for another month"). Then, when the weather breaks it's game on until the summer heat exhausts everyone, retailer and gardener alike.

My situation could never compare to the long days at a garden center, but I can only imagine how tough it is for retailers who are also parents trying to navigate May. From testing dates (AP, SATs, ACTs, state, etc.) to year-end school and sports activities to remembering myriad of things to buy (did you buy your yearbooks for an insanely exorbitant rate yet?) and many other nuggets that require attention, it's a wonder any of it gets done. And yet, somehow it does.

We have joyful moments here, too—my son's birthday is in May and is always a wonderful celebration, and this year he heads to our nation's capital with his classmates for a school trip (which, of course, he'll love and I'll worry about until he gets back). And, as a gardener, May brings the return of digging in the dirt and enjoying fresh blooms with an ice cold drink outside. Of course, these days that comes with an aching back and an insufferably runny nose (thanks, spring allergies), but those are minor compared to the joy of seeing the garden unfurl from its winter slumber.

To rip off a Gen X banger that'll be your earworm for the rest of the day, "You take the good, you take the bad, and there you have ..."—in this case, May. I offer you up some distraction from your daily deluge of "Do you have any more of this?" and "Does this come in blue? I mean, real blue?" Or, alternatively, this can be reading material on your vacation once the busy season is wrapped in a neat little bow. Regardless of when you read it, this issue is chocked full of goodies.

We start inside, zooming in on houseplants and how that department is evolving. Former fourth-generation garden retailer turned consultant (yes, you read that right!) David Williams talked us through the fine art of setting up a houseplant pop-up shop and what he learned from it. It can be a welcome exercise in attracting new customers and bringing in some cash during downtime. Then I take a look at some adjustments we're seeing retailers make to encourage repeat visitors and bump sales in this department.

Moving outdoors, Lowell Halvorson walks us through the many applications of wax begonias and Andrew Bunting gets tough with resilient plants that work in urban landscapes. Freelance writer Wendy Komancheck takes us on the road for a visit to Ashcombe Farm and Greenhouses.

Hopefully, May is a great month for you—though sometimes it's hard to appreciate it all when you're right in the middle of it. I think that's OK, too. Getting through it is reward enough (and I've always found dark chocolate helps in a pinch, too). **GP**