



Bridget White, Editorial Director
(847) 391-1004 • bwwhite@sgcmail.com

Increasing Consumer Purchases

Not to detract from the plants — after all, they are the stars of the show — but one of my favorite things about the California Pack Trials is the time between stops...the hours on the road, the evening meals and the precious free time. Sure, it can get a little silly at times — you name the road trip game, we've played it — but there are also some really great conversations. One such conversation, which took place over drinks with John Holmes and Steve Carver from OFA, still has me thinking.

One night in Ventura, the crew from *GPN*, Catherine Evans, Carrie Burns and myself, along with our travelling companions from the University of Florida, Rick Schoellhorn and Chris Cervený, were enjoying micro-brews and snacks with John and Steve when someone brought up the subject of increasing flower consumption. (I actually think it was my fault for asking how housing starts can be so strong and floriculture growth so lax.) Talk about a conversation killer. Everyone just stared off into space for what seemed like minutes not knowing what to say about this on-going problem.

Maybe it's because he is still a graduate student and not yet jaded, but Chris finally broke the silence with a suggestion of advertising — industry-supported, upscale, lifestyle advertising that would run in high-end shelter magazines such as *O*, *Southern Living* and *Elle Décor*. Chris argued that plants are an essential part of any well-executed design, both interior and exterior, and while shelter magazines often cover exterior landscaping, they rarely elaborate on how the tulips gracing the entry table or the oversized palms flanking the windows are part of the design. His point was that ads can bridge the gap between the increasing interest in interior design and stagnant plant sales by helping consumers view plants as home décor.

Amen. Not to knock plants as gifts, but I think personal consumption represents the largest growth area for our industry. After all, even if you give your host flowers every time you dine with friends you will not even come close to buying as much as if you keep blooming plants or arrangements in your home...I know because I do both.

Yes, I'm all for plants as décor, but before we get to that point, I think we need to change the way people think about plants. I know I will get hate mail when I say this, but plants are not like luggage...you don't need to keep them forever. What's wrong with enjoying an arrangement or potted flowering plant while it looks nice, then throwing it away and getting a new one?

Even here at the office we have to look at a "saved" poinsettia from six months ago. Someone in the office (definitely not a *GPN* staffer) has housed it in the kitchen, away from the sunlight, thinking it will rebloom, and they will have a beautiful poinsettia this Christmas. I want to find the culprit and beg them to put the poor, struggling plant out of its misery.

Maybe this is an American characteristic... never give up. Maybe it's a genuine desire to nourish something. I don't know, but imagine how many more plants we could sell each year if people changed their houseplants as often as they change their mood or if everyone treated plants like the city of Chicago. I watched recently as landscapers pulled still blooming tulips out of the flower beds to install spring pansies. In a few weeks, the pansies will come out to make way for the summer plantings, which will eventually move over for fall color and then winter art.

Five times a year, the city of Chicago changes its plant décor. Imagine if everyone did this. What a great, untapped market for our industry. All we have to do now is figure out how to tap it. Ideas anyone?

Bridget C. White

next month...

- Barrett explains variances in PGR dip results
- Chase on unusual *Alternaria* diseases
- New and innovative seed introductions from Pack Trials

plus...

- Perfecting early poinsettia drenches
- Greenhouse production software
- Aster production