

Edibles Insights from a Millennial Grower

I have a confession to make. I'm a millennial. Simply put, that means I tend to look at things differently than previous generations. And that new perspective gives me an added advantage in this industry, and I'd like to explain why.

According to the Garden Media Group's 2015 Garden Trends Report, male millennials like myself, who comprise one quarter of the U.S. population, are spending \$100 more per year on plants and garden products than the average consumer. This group of individuals, aged 18 to 35, is a growing segment, larger than the baby boomer generation that has been the bread and butter of most garden retailers.

Millennials like me crave adventure. And while each of us may not plan to set out on an African safari or K2 climbing expedition, we do all want to experience new ideas, sample different cultures and expand our horizons.

As a whole, millennials are more focused, not only on bettering ourselves, but also on how we can impact the world around us. In fact, many in my generation are finding adventure in their own backyards by growing their own fruits, vegetables and herbs to share with family and friends.

To remain relevant to millennials, smart garden retailers need to create an edibles destination within their walls to attract this growing market segment. In addition to increasing their centers' offering, edibles will serve as a "gateway drug," so to speak for gardeners — a way to introduce this audience to annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees. All while cultivating a positive, deeper, growing relationship with them.

In launching our new Savor Edibles & Fragrants line this year, our goal has been to engage this generation — my generation — by helping them along their gardening journey in an effort to cultivate a healthier, more sustainable lifestyle. And, as they continue their adventure, the Savor will continue to grow with them.

By doing the same, savvy garden centers have a unique opportunity to reach a new audience in a whole new way. Instead of just selling plants to customers to improve their landscape, retailers can now sell customers on the broader gardening experience, which includes cooking, canning, crafting and socializing throughout every step of the process (just ask my wife about that one!).

And the more garden centers tap into the full gardening and, really, life experience with its customers, the stronger relationship they build together and the more apt those customers are to return and tell others about their wonderful adventure.

To help make that happen, many of the garden centers we serve offer classes to show beginning gardeners how to plant their first vegetable garden, while others offer classes on grilling or canning with homegrown herbs and veggies. I've even heard of some retailers teaching garden-inspired crafts like herbal wreath making and holding fairy garden workshops that incorporate edibles. A growing number even help their neighborhoods grow by supporting community gardens with local schools and churches. By helping foster these positive experiences, you'll be bringing customers back to your store again and again.

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But retailers aren't the only ones who'll benefit from this new way of thinking. Adding edibles to commercial growing operations allows growers to expand their footprint as well. Adding edibles will enable growers to become more than just a supplier of annuals or a nursery stock. Doing so will effectively extend their brand and their market reach; in essence, enabling their retail customers to better serve their own customers.

Commercial growers that add edibles to their mix are also able to utilize their operation more efficiently. For example, when growers use production lines or greenhouses that are slow or empty after harvesting spring annuals to grow herbs and vegetables, it's not only a win for growers, but a win for retailers, who will make this wider selection of products available to their newly acquired millennial customers ... people just like me. [gpn](#)



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