

Going Mainstream with Gardening

We've named plants after movies, songs and superheroes. We've gotten endorsements from celebrities, and we've even seen the garden become a focal point at the White House. Still, if you find yourself in deep conversation with industry folks, one question continually comes up: "How do we make gardening cool?"

Newsflash! Gardening is *already* cool.

In the last few years, plants have made the jump to light speed and powered their way into cultural significance. Fixer Upper, Guardians of the Galaxy, The Martian. Plants are all over the place. You just have to bend your definition of "gardener" a little bit to see that plants have become an active part of most lifestyles. Sure, we aren't seeing a renaissance of people sculpting out large flower beds, but we are seeing a significant growing interest in plants of different classes.

As we've seen on GrowIt! and from our friends at retail, tropicals and foliage are now staples and aren't showing any signs of slowing down either.

Edibles remain a giant trend in the plant community, even if in the last year or so it's seemed to plateau a bit. Native plants are also making big moves. As pollinator programs pick up steam, and continually gain support from outside industries, people will look to help those initiatives, and it appears that native plants will be a huge beneficiary of that.

If plants are so cool already, why aren't we being overrun by customers? Why aren't we seeing double digit growth as an industry?

It's going to take time. As an industry, we just weren't prepared. There was a good chunk of 10 to 12 years that just seemed to pass us by. We were slow to adopt things like social media, smart phones and e-commerce. We waited while every other industry was furiously adapting to the rapidly changing economy. We paid a steep price, but now that's starting to change. This is a time for optimism.

"Plants are different. You'll never be able to ship full-grown plants across the country safely, while being affordable." How many people are guilty of saying that at one point? I know I am. Now look! You've got dozens of companies shipping finished plants to consumers across the United States. We have rarely been a technology-first industry, but now tech startups are popping up with solutions to industry problems. It's a change for sure, but one that we can use to our advantage.

Across the industry, businesses are shedding preconceived ideas, and taking advantage of a consumer population that is primed and ready to buy. They're thinking outside of the box, and staying open to new business concepts. To make sure you're taking advantage of the green resurgence, here's what you should be thinking about:

Updating Technology. Staying up to date with modern technology is no longer something that makes you seem hip or trendy. It's something that keeps you in business. Having a website that was last updated a decade ago (or even three years ago) won't cut it. It's the first exposure a customer has to your business, and first impressions don't mean anything less than they used to. Just as important as your website is your inventory/POS system. People want to know what you have before they visit your business. We are quickly approaching a point where this will be a necessity to keep customers coming through the door.

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Making Sure People Can Find You. Following closely on the tails of technology, is making sure that your marketing is where it should be. That all starts with the simplest idea: make sure people know where your business is. If someone can't find your business while they're looking for planting inspiration, there's a problem. The marketing mix has changed. Search engine optimization (SEO) and social media are things you should be investing real dollars into. It's important to look at new angles as well, as they can often be the most affordable. Essentially, that's what we're doing at GrowIt! with our Garden Shops program. Driving consumers looking for plants into garden centers they didn't know existed.

Looking at Different Plants. It took us too long as an industry to adapt when consumers were telling us they were interested in succulents. Don't let that happen again with houseplants. We may think of tropicals and foliage plants as something of the past, but we should know by now everything comes back around. The indoor jungle trend is happening with young people once again. It's also worth noting that as commercial vertical farming gains traction, more people will be looking to do the same thing in their living spaces. That means carrying vegetables and herbs designed for indoor gardening systems could be a wise choice.

Think Outside of the Industry. It's important to pay attention to what our horticultural peers are up to, but it's also very important to pay attention to what other industries are doing. What are other companies doing from a sales structure perspective (Birchbox, StitchFix)? How are companies handling logistical issues and returns (Amazon, Jet)? There are lessons to be learned from other industries. Not only in what has worked, but also in what has failed. [gpn](#)



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