

# Discovering New Opportunity in 2021

**2020 has proven to be** a year unlike most of us have seen before. From the challenges with early spring and Easter crops to the strong demand that growers saw in May and beyond, many growers have discovered new opportunities and new customers for their products, as well as found new creative ways to sell and new insights on pricing and discounting.

## 2020: A LESSON LEARNED

In late May and early June, I had grower-retailers looking for more product that simply was not available; growers were sold out much earlier than anticipated but they did not want to disappoint their customers. It got me thinking about how many garden centers rely on their spring crop to bring in sales over the summer months and do not have a robust summer or fall planting schedule for fresh material at retail, a schedule that was exacerbated

this year by the strong demand in May and early June.

We live in a world of instant gratification, where things are available through the tap of a phone. Younger customers who are new to gardening don't always realize the peak six weeks of spring that most growers target. These customers want to buy what they want when they want it and will go to the retailer who offers that. If they come in and see overgrown product that is past prime, they will likely go elsewhere and not be back during that time of year. Fresh product is key to keeping customers coming back throughout the summer and into fall. Summer programs don't have to be the same as your spring crops. Growers can target different inputs to allow for a reduced retail price that many customers are looking for at that time of year.

Based on the strong demand in 2020, many retailers were able to avoid later season discounts this spring, as demand was high early and continued to be strong through the summer and into fall. As we look ahead to next year and beyond, how can we change our pricing strategies? More inventory-based discounting and planned specific promotions can help drive retail traffic, while we get away from broad discounts at predetermined times.

## OPPORTUNITY BEYOND SPRING

Fall crops have continued with very strong sales in the Midwest and there are so many opportunities to have a robust fall selling season. Combo planters and a wider variety of late summer and fall annuals allow customers to design what they want or grab-and-go with a pre-built combo. Fall is a wonderful time for fresh perennials as well; the timing is great for planting perennials in the landscape or using them in combinations with



mums and other cold tolerant crops as the nights get cooler. Some options for increased fall sales:

- Echinacea Artisan Series
- Heuchera
- Rudbeckia Dakota
- Euphorbia Ascot Rainbow
- Leucanthemum
- Coreopsis
- Grasses
- Hibiscus
- Fall annuals (or fall-colored annuals – think orange calibrachoa)

Many customers, particularly this year, are looking for a fall activity or experience beyond just grabbing a couple of mums for the front porch. Are you able to execute planting classes or demonstrations to help your customers get exactly what they want for their harvest display? Are the young kids having fun when they come visit your garden center?

Gardening is an escape for many people, while others just want their house or balcony to look nice and seasonal. As an industry, we have an opportunity that we have not had in a long time — with so many new gardeners trying their hand at planting something in 2020, what can we do to keep them engaged in 2021 and beyond?

If we provide them with a fun experience, the knowledge of how to take care of their new plants, and the excitement of knowing they can come back throughout the growing season to add to their collection (or replace something that didn't turn out as expected) we can turn these new gardeners into lifelong customers and help to grow the industry that we all love. [gpn](#)



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