

SHUFFLING BEYOND THE SUPPLY CHAIN

The past year has had its share of challenges, many that we were probably optimistically hoping would have been resolved by now. While most of the growers I've spoken with recently have had another record year, it has come with its own set of obstacles, the main one being disruptions at the supply chain level.

I recently surveyed our readers for our monthly Chat Room survey, which you can find on page 10. You'll see that a large majority of respondents admitted that sourcing materials has been a struggle the past two seasons.

When I asked growers to share their experience, many did not hesitate to reveal the many ways their operations have been affected. Everything has a domino effect, and it seems to be one thing after another. "It has become a full-time job securing materials for production," one reader said. He continued, "And the price has gone through the roof. It's really made a difficult year that much more difficult. I had a really hard time getting my [plants] because of quarantine damage to mother plants. And then when the plants were finally ready to ship, the grower didn't have cardboard boxes to ship them!"

I'm not here to tell you what you already know, but more to assure you are definitely not alone in this ongoing struggle. If anything, this current challenge is forcing many of us to think outside the box in coming up with solutions. Some growers are altering schedules, substituting items, recycling materials when possible, and even partnering with other local growers to swap items.

Based on survey responses, I do know that sourcing growing media has been one of the biggest obstacles over the past year. That's why we asked Brian Jackson of North Carolina State University to share his insight into what is happening and how growers can address the problem and move forward. You can read his article on page 16.

As many of you are forced to substitute your usual production materials, plant health has become a concern as well. On page 20, Jozsef Racsko of Mycorrhizal Applications, discusses ways to improve soil health through the use of microbial inoculants.

Only time will tell when the supply chain will resume pre-COVID activity. As a consumer, it's created minor setbacks in my home as well. One traumatic experience in particular: my 7-year-old's Halloween costume NEVER arrived! By the time you read this, he may or may not have forgiven me yet ...

SOME GOOD NEWS!

Despite the supply chain issues facing the industry, there is good news to report. Axiom Marketing, a firm based in Minneapolis, recently shared its findings from its Gardening Insights Survey. And their research shows that 62% of respondents said they will be planting more in 2022 and 44% indicated they plan to spend more hours gardening than they did last year.

When asked what is driving their interest, the top response focused on gardening's ability to lower stress and create an overall sense of health and well-being. While we often hear the pitfalls and failures new gardeners experience, 84% of those surveyed said they were feeling confident this season and had success in the garden in 2021.

These numbers are all very encouraging as we look to 2022. We are certainly all stressed for many reasons, but these findings remind us why we do what we do! If you would like to download the entire report, go to www.axiomcom.com/2022-gardening-survey.



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