

HOW CAN GROWERS Help Nurture THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY?

Through industry collaboration, we can inspire an early love for horticulture in our youth.



BY EM SHIPMAN

Through the years, there's been an echoing sentiment across the industry that fewer people are pursuing careers in horticulture and plant-related sciences. You hear about labor shortages at conferences or in articles about recruiting growers out of college. Inside the industry, we are passionate about what we do, but we face challenges in perception and accessibility outside of it.

As growers, you are accustomed to playing the long game. You plant seeds and patiently watch the plants grow, sometimes for years before they are ready. Why not do the same with our youth — the future of the industry? After all, if kids aren't noticing the plants and the world around them, how can they develop a life-long appreciation for nature? Why would they consider that a career working with plants is even possible?

CULTIVATING CURIOSITY

Children have an instinctual curiosity about the natural world, and a garden is an exceptional place for them to explore that interest. As a mom to two young boys, I've learned that gardening also helps kids slow down, notice the world around them, and calm their little minds and bodies. By connecting their senses to their natural surroundings, they behave better, eat better and get more physical activity, so they sleep better!

Through gardening, children cultivate a growth mindset. They learn to appreciate "mistakes" as fun and creative opportunities to try something new. They nurture their sense of curiosity, awe, and wonder in the natural world and its processes. And when they interact with edible crops in the garden, they develop healthier relationships with food and nutrition.

POWER THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Organizations like Seed Your Future, AmericanHort and KidsGardening are working to spread positive messaging and create valuable resources to share their passion for plants, nature and gardening with younger generations. With interest in gardening at an all-time high, now is the time to partner with organizations like ours that engage and promote youth involvement in horticulture. This kind of partnership is an investment in the industry's future and the next generation of leaders and customers.

Though garden retailers are often considered the public face of the industry, growers and other horticulture professionals can play just as vital a role in introducing youth to the joys of gardening. But how?



(All photos: KidsGardening)

Partnering with organizations like KidGardening shows your community and the industry that you are committed to the future. Corporate sponsors allow us to develop an ever-expanding array of multimedia resources, grants, curricula, and other learning opportunities and support a community of educators and caregivers bringing the life-changing benefits of gardening to kids.

Over the years, KidsGardening has established mutually beneficial partnerships with industry members including Ball Horticultural Co., Meadows Farms, Breck's Bulbs and White Flower Farm.





"We are thrilled to collaborate with KidsGardening," says Anna Ball at Ball Horticultural Co. "We believe in gardens as powerful learning spaces that connect kids with nature, inspire curiosity and attract even more children to pursue gardening as a hobby or even a career."

Corporate partnerships can extend beyond financial support. As growers, you can engage with your communities and create programs that educate and inspire kids in your backyard. For example, growers can donate plants, recycled containers and other supplies to youth programs. You can invite local schools and community

groups to your production operation, show them how plants are grown, and tell them about potential careers. You can participate in job fairs and visit classrooms to spread the word.

With the popularity of gardening at an all-time high, the horticulture industry is perfectly poised to encourage more kids to engage in gardening and to support the work of nonprofits like KidsGardening. Spikes like this can fade, so it's essential to capitalize on this moment by inspiring youth to explore the power of plants and the rewards of a career in horticulture.

This is our moment! By working together, we can teach kids that plants impact our daily lives and that there is a diversity of plant-based careers options in art, science, technology and business. Working together, we are a powerful force in growing the next generation of industry leaders and lifelong customers. [gpn](https://www.gpn.org)

Em Shipman is executive director of KidsGardening, a national nonprofit that supports youth gardening through grants and original educational materials. She believes that garden-based learning and hands-on, place-based education are powerful tools for growing a better world. To learn more about KidsGardening, visit www.kidsgardening.org, or to learn more about how you can engage the youth in your community, email emilys@kidsgardening.org.

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