
INVESTMENT GRADE

RETAIL *Perennials*

By John Johnston, Retail Education Manager

Perennials are one of the most beloved plants in the garden throughout the world. With so many varietal options, colors, and seasonal blooming durations, perennials are a consumer favorite that builds a garden timeline of anticipation around the home. What are the contributing factors in its amazing retail growth? Here are a few (from the field) insights into this incredible sales trend.

THE INFLUENCE OF HGTV

Once traveling and vacation plans were cancelled in early spring 2020, America became home bound “couch potatoes” looking to do something, anything around the home to keep busy. Gardening became our favorite hobby once again. Seeing HGTV home flips with ornamental grasses, interesting perennial flowers, and combination planters turned watchers towards the digital highway for more information. Online “curbside” pickup sales, was the equivalent of a blindfolded leap of faith that the plant they were buying was exactly what the picture showed on the internet and TV. Once consumers started shopping locally, perennials were in bloom in the garden centers. According to an April 2020 HGTV article on homeowner returns on home improvement investments, landscaping is number #2 on the list with a 100% investment return on your dollar.

<https://www.hgtv.com/lifestyle/real-estate/top-home-updates-that-pay-off-pictures>

SEEING IS BELIEVING!

A good portion of consumers were first introduced to perennials by visiting garden centers in the springtime and seeing firsthand the majestic blooms of daylilies, Shasta daisies, foxtail, coneflowers, and garden phlox just to name a few. The newly purchased plant bloomed magnificently and besides watering, it was neglected, but noticeable in the landscape or garden. Having success, changes the consumer’s outlook on gardening. The most recent example of this acceptance would be the perception of roses being a lot of work. The Knockout rose changed that belief and launched a movement towards carefree, no worry gardening.

Daylilies have been a landscape favorite for years as a long-term investment for their free blooming flowers that need little to no care.



FILLER, SPILLER, THRILLER

Perennials rival other varieties of plants for its versatility in combination planters, with unmatched color options in flowers, almost any planter benefits from a complimentary planting. Not too long ago, these combo planters were dominated only by annual plantings. Fast forward to retail today. Some of the first planters to sell are the ones peppered with unique perennial plants. Factor in some perennials that do well with part shade like hardy geranium, dianthus, hosta, and chrysanthemum, you have a bevy of colors to choose from. Customize your plantings and offer something no box store would dare to attempt. Ornamental grasses like purple russian sage gives you the height needed for the thriller element along with eye-catching movement.

PERENNIAL PRODUCTS FOR HOMEOWNERS

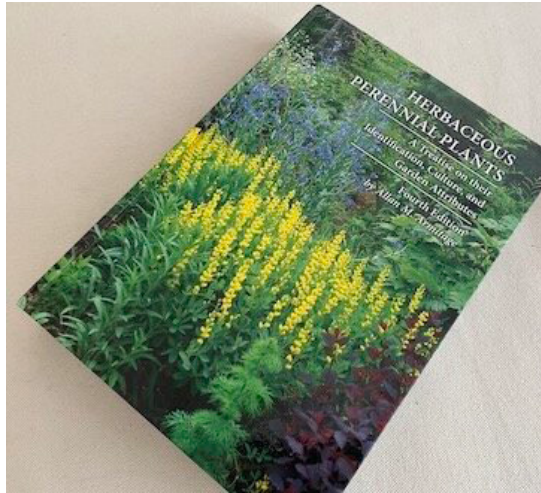
Retail stores can benefit by providing a section of “plant supports” for their clientele. The options range from trellis, obelisks, and arbors to loop stakes, single and double ring supports, u hoops, and grow grids. Add the needed accessories like plant tags, ties, clips, and netting and you can anticipate that it will need some display space. The difficulty of promoting is not having the ability to put it outside and exposed to the elements with the perennials. Today, many manufacturers design their product tags to handle outdoor elements including sun exposure by using plastic or vinyl material, so they can offer their products with outdoor displays. The retailer has opportunities to make excellent profit margins on the sale of these items in their “Plant Pal” department.

TAG IT!

Successful gardening has always been a bit of trial and error. Learning on the go can have a direct impact on anyone's wallet. The more you know about planting conditions for perennials, the better (and least costly) it is for long lasting value. Breeders and grower community alike have made vast improvements with complimentary information tags for plants, especially perennials. These "must-have" silent salesmen are important directions for planting care, plant dimensions, and exposure requirements. Trendy retailers spend extra time and capital creating table or nursery signage to help their shoppers.

DISPLAY IT!

Perennial sales are dominated by quart size to 1 gallon size potted plants. Traditionally, the quart pots are displayed in trays on tables while the gallon size and larger are staged on the ground or stepped up on tiered benching. The challenge today is keeping these perennials in tip top condition for retail sales, especially when they are in bloom. Fresh is the name of the game for explosive plant sales. Retailers are making capital improvements to ensure moisture (and fertilization) by installing ebb and flow flood tables in their greenhouses and nursery yard. Cost effective when compared to manual hand watering, it conserves water use and offers the opportunity to utilize fertilization from the bottom up without risk of any foliage burn from plants under duress. Portable Dosatrons are easily moved from bench to bench and fill tables with the correct ratio of fertilizer to gallons of water.



EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE AND NUMBERS

Independent garden centers hold one key advantage over box store selections, variety. Having a diverse assortment of perennial plants not only promotes initial sales, but it also draws the consumer to return because of your variety offerings. With social media touting the joy of exciting perennials, it also multiplies the consumer reach by region. Some of the best advertising of independent garden centers comes with no expense from tags on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Without question, knowledge plays an important part in making good perennial recommendations to your customers. One of the highest book recommendations I can offer, is the 4th edition of *Herbaceous Perennial Plants* by Dr. Alan Armitage. Any gardener can benefit from this fantastic book from one of the most recognized authorities about the subject of perennials. Dr. Armitage writes his book with passionate observations and humor unlike any gardening book on the market. It is the "reference book" for perennials throughout the world.



We hope you have enjoyed John's articles. After more than a decade with Griffin, John has retired and will be enjoying the next chapter of his life. We thank John for his contribution to the Gazette and to Griffin. It's time to follow dreams long set aside and enjoy the rewards of work done well.