

# GARDEN Chic life

Adventures in  
IGC Entrepreneurial  
Retailing

featuring  
Hillermann Nursery and Florist  
Washington, MO

## Scott Hillermann, Vice President

AS THE VICE PRESIDENT and second generation of family leadership at Hillermann Nursery and Florist in Washington, MO, Scott Hillermann is constantly looking for fresh ways to keep the garden center on the cutting edge. "We get ideas that come from both sides - the West and East Coasts. It usually takes a few years before they hit the Midwest, so we consider ourselves ahead," he says.

The latest inspiration put into action at the garden center: "Hillermann's Food Court." The surge of interest in growing edibles led to the creation of this special section, which wraps up edible gardening in one area. Here, customers find a wide variety of plantable fruits and vegetables, as well as edible ornamentals. Young homeowners have especially taken an interest in edibles the past couple of years at Hillermann's; the consolidated food court concept was designed as a way to make it easy for them to shop the category.

### Gardening for Gen X / Gen Y

Gardening is different for Gen X / Gen Y than it is for older, long-time customers, Hillermann says: "It seems, today, time is a lot shorter. Young homeowners are doing the easy pop-up things like containers, which have become huge."

Flowering plants top younger customers' lists. "The biggest deal for their homes is color," Hillermann says. The key is to give them the confidence to try new things in the garden. Gen X / Gen Y gardeners are

often hesitant to take a risk with plants because they are embarrassed that they could be unsuccessful, Hillermann says. To help ease their jitters, he relates to them by explaining that he may have killed that same plant a couple years ago - gardening is a learn-as-you-go process.



As another way of connecting with Gen X / Gen Y customers, Hillermann started an e-mail newsletter sent out on a monthly basis. "We do a lot of e-mail-based information - that's really been successful in getting their attention," he says. The newsletters include coupons to entice shoppers to come to the store.

The garden center's website is updated weekly to include upcoming events, and for the future, Hillermann is thinking about offering online shopping: "We've had more of a demand for purchasing online. The younger people are asking for it." Twenty-four-hour e-commerce would solve a challenge the garden center currently grapples with: store hours. "We can never get it down to perfectly to match every customer's schedule," Hillermann says. "The box stores force us

to stay open later, but it's not feasible sometimes to stay open so late."

### Education Is Essential

Educating customers is credited as the key to the garden center's success. "We take a lot of phone calls each day for education," Hillermann says.

Demand for information is so high that the garden center has dedicated an area in the store where customers can go for answers to their questions. "We have installed a counter inside the middle of the store that's dedicated to answering all questions," Hillermann says. The "Garden Pharmacy" is frequently manned by knowledgeable staff and always stocked with handout materials, presented alphabetically by subject. Directly behind the counter, the products that serve

as solutions are displayed for sale.

One area that generates many questions from customers is organics. Although sales in the category are strong, Hillermann isn't fully organic because there are still a sizeable number of customers interested in "quick fix" chemicals. "We are not 100 percent organic, but I think some day in the future we are going to go down that road," Hillermann says.

Another category that demands customer education: wildlife, including birding. "The younger crowd is interested," Hillermann says, "they're asking a lot of questions." In addition to an extensive line of feeders and seed, mealworms are a hot seller. "We're in Missouri so it's one of the largest areas for birds," he says. "There's been big demand in birding." ■

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