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SEPTEMBER 2023

Growing Success: Morgan Park Garden Centre Navigating the Changing Landscape

In today's ever-evolving marketplace, businesses need to recognise and cater to consumer wants and needs to stay sustainable.

The Nursery Consumer Usage and Attitudes – Key Findings Report, funded by Hort Innovation, highlights a crucial connection between consumers' knowledge of plant care and their inclination to make purchases.

It also sheds light on shifting buying patterns prompted by post-COVID adjustments and increasing cost of living concerns.

Morgan Park Garden Centre, in picturesque Victor Harbor, South Australia, is a family-owned and award-winning independent garden centre.

As a second-generation family business with over 30 years of history in horticulture, Morgan Park Garden Centre is deeply committed to helping customers achieve their gardening aspirations.

Its five full-time employees, rooted in the local community, provide professional guidance and supply all gardening needs.

PANDEMIC DRIVES INTEREST IN PLANTS

Chris Simon, Morgan Park Garden Centre's Manager and Co-owner believes COVID era lockdowns sparked a surge in consumer interest in plant life, and increased plant purchases, particularly among a younger demographic, which has continued post COVID-19.

"While indoor plants were initially popular, there has been a recent shift towards edible plants – many customers are creating vegetable patches.

"While edibles remain strong, customers with grand dreams of creating a large edible garden have downscaled, recognising that growing food is not as straightforward as they initially thought," Chris said.



Chris Simon, Garden Centre Manager and Co-owner of Morgan Park Garden Centre

Downscaling is partly due to the return to office work, leaving gardeners with less time and energy to tend their gardens. This often prompts a change in what they grow and how they manage their gardening efforts.

The report shows that knowledge and confidence in maintaining plants drive consumer purchasing behaviour.

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BARRIERS TO PLANT PURCHASES

Barriers to purchasing plants include 'not having time to nurture plants' and 'plants always seeming to die,' as well as cost and a lack of indoor and outdoor space.

"In gardening, the more you know, the more willing you are to spend money on your garden," Chris said.

"Beginners often start with cheaper plants, but as they learn more, they realise that investing more can make their gardening experience better.

"We have found building good relationships with customers and encouraging them to ask questions is crucial.

"Getting good advice in gardening is really important. When customers feel comfortable asking questions, it helps them have successful gardens. It's nice to see people with small gardens coming back to show us their success," Chris said.

COST-CONSCIOUSNESS

"At Morgan Park Garden Centre, we've noticed cost-consciousness has led to durable choices. We've seen a decline in annuals and colourful potted plants, with people preferring investments that don't need frequent replacement. For example, we've seen a rise in sales of practical, sure-fire options like tough native plants with guaranteed longevity," Chris said.

"Economic pressures have also made fruit trees a favourite choice among gardeners. They offer excellent value because the fruit they bear can often offset the initial cost and the trees eventually pay for themselves.

"As retailers, we've responded to the preference for low-maintenance, long-lasting plants by increasing our inventory of these hassle-free options.

"To cater to this growing trend, we've made strategic changes in our nursery layout, allocating more space for the low-maintenance plant category and reducing the area dedicated to items like roses.

"We also carefully curate our plant selection, ensuring it's well-suited to our local climate and environment. Quality is paramount. We source plants from trusted suppliers and offer premium potting mixes, giving customers the assurance of success in their gardening endeavours.

"We take a multi-faceted approach to sharing valuable information, using in-person interactions, e-newsletters and social media platforms to educate our customers. We know customer education boosts sales." Chris said.

Despite the downturn in various product types after COVID, Morgan Park Garden Centre remains confident about the future.

A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE OF CONSUMER HABITS

"We believe we've reached the bottom of the economic dip and things are starting to look up," Chris said.

As a business, Morgan Park Garden Centre has always adapted to trends, such as the increased demand for more exotic herbs and vegetables such as apple mint after *MasterChef* gained popularity in the early 2010s.

"We will always evolve to meet changing customer preferences. Gardening is like anything else, with trends and fashion driving customers' purchases."

ENDS

The 'Consumer usage and attitude tracking 2022/23 (MT21202)' project is funded by Hort Innovation using nursery research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government.