

# Nursery Papers

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Issue no. 9



## Why do people spend money on their gardens?

And, perhaps more importantly, what prevents people spending money on their gardens?

Those were the key questions posed for consumer research conducted this year by Mark Dignam & Associates Pty Ltd.

The study was conducted nationally across Australia involving 500 people including:

- Active gardeners of all ages;
- Those who don't themselves garden but have a garden and are interested in it;
- The gardening media.

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Nursery & Garden Industry  
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## Understanding gardeners and garden owners

Gardeners and garden owners already believe gardening is good value for money. So you as nursery retailers or growers should focus on offering value and benefits for both products and services rather than worrying about price.

This *Nursery Paper* summarises the findings of a consumer research study conducted this year by Mark Dignam & Associates Pty Ltd.

The major findings were:

**People think gardening is good value for money. Time and interest are more likely to prevent garden purchases than cost.**

Having the time to spend gardening and the interest in doing so are more likely to limit garden purchases than the cost involved. There were several reasons for this:

- Firstly and overwhelmingly, people think gardening is good value for money (92% agreement).
- People generally think gardening is labour intensive, not costly, except for major projects. They feel they can easily economise and fit their purchases into a budget by bargain hunting or using cuttings, for example. So finding the time is harder than finding the money.
- Most people are NOT committed gardeners. Only 8% of those surveyed see gardening as a priority. To most, gardening has to fit in with other activities, and those with less interest in gardening see the garden as something to keep under control. Don't assume people are all keen gardeners, as the survey indicated gardening competes with many other activities and interests.



**Gardening is great value for money. It makes me feel good and, as long as I have helpful plant information, it's easy.**

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## What does this mean for retailers and growers?

Focus on value, not price. Value relates to all the benefits you offer, including: service, delivery, product characteristics, advice and information, inspiring and attractive displays, labels, range, amenities, regular specials and loyalty schemes.

## People are becoming more demanding and have increasing expectations.

Time pressures experienced by many shoppers put greater demands on garden centres and higher expectations on levels of service.

People want garden centres to be more than "just retailers". They want rational benefits as well as inspiration and rewards, for example:

- Rational benefits include range, advice, good information, healthy plants, personal service, a reasonable price and convenient location.

- More interested gardeners also want to be inspired by the appearance of a garden centre, its water features, theme displays, use of colour etc. These benefits create a competitive advantage especially for the more involved and interested gardeners.
- In terms of improvements, most people talked about better service (advice, information, etc) and improved appearance of garden centres.

## What does this mean for retailers?

Provide inspirational displays, easy to adopt ideas, time-saving suggestions as well as loyalty programs that give customers a sense of reward and positive feelings about themselves.

## What does this mean for growers?

Highlight plant health, vigour and quality, provide helpful plant information and attractive labels.



Production nurseries can provide a complete information guide on all the plants they grow and sell. 'The Guide' produced by Naturally Native, New Zealand, is very popular with their garden centre and landscaper customers.



## Don't assume people have a high level of knowledge.

While some gardeners (9% of people) identify themselves as 'green thumbs' and have a high level of interest and knowledge, most gardeners regard themselves as being "quite" or "not very" knowledgeable about gardening.

This lack of knowledge doesn't mean a lack of interest, though. While few are very knowledgeable, almost half (43%) rate themselves as being "very" interested in gardening or their gardens and another 41% are "quite" interested.

This may explain why so much gardening activity is trial and error. Unfortunately, failures quickly de-motivate people. Learning correct techniques at the start is more likely to build a long-term interest in gardening.

The challenge for the industry is in **building knowledge**, more than just interest.

## What does this mean for retailers and growers?

Provide useful, easy to understand plant and gardening information, such as fact sheets and informative labels. These are important marketing tools for both retailers and growers.

Likewise, qualified, competent and well-trained staff will provide better advice to interested customers.

Retailers can further add value by offering garden health and/or design services.

## Learning to garden should start early and must be fun. If you don't grab them as children then you may have to wait till they buy their first home.

A literature review suggested that starting to garden at a young age is critical to longer-term enjoyment of gardening. However, the **way** gardening is introduced is just as important. People who were given gardening "chores" as children are



Attractive and informative labels are seen as an essential part of the plant package by today's consumers. **Tharfield Nursery, New Zealand.**



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less enthusiastic than those who were able to undertake their own gardening "projects."

Gardening needs to be a fun learning experience that is actively encouraged at home and at school. With young children, parents (more often the mother) play a central role, while other relatives also exert some influence.

The media is the main source of information and inspiration for adults, with nurseries and garden centres playing a relatively minor role.

Four in five people initially like gardens and gardening, while others develop an interest at a later age. Some develop an interest only when they can personally plan the garden, such as when they buy their first home.

Importantly, first time home owners often have little knowledge of gardening. They've done little or no gardening as young adults, and need guidance and encouragement from retail staff.

### What does this mean for retailers and growers?

You can get and keep customers by:

- Developing fun, informative and creative projects with schools and other children's groups;
- Developing marketing strategies with real estate agents and land developers;
- Reinforcing that gardening is fun, easy and rewarding on labels, signage and promotional material.

### People garden for many reasons, but mostly for personal achievement or gratification.

People cite many reasons why they garden, but consistent themes include:

- The single biggest thing driving people to garden is satisfaction or pride. (This is consistent with The Mackay Report (June 2003), which asserts that consumers are motivated by the need to "feel better about ourselves.") Gardening also provides a sense of escapism from normal life and its pressures.



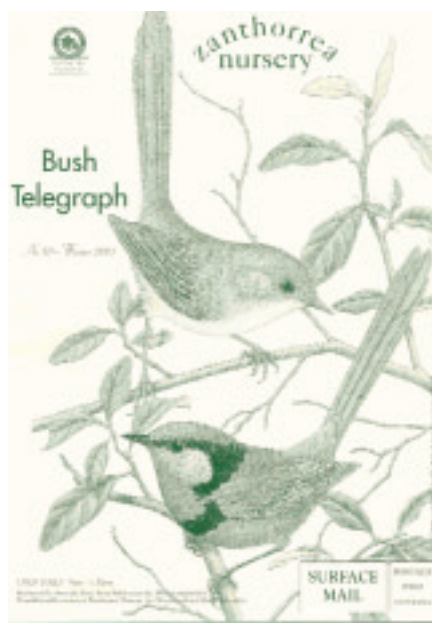
Informative self-help sheets can point customers in the right direction. Zanthorrea Nursery, WA.

- Many have very personal reasons for enjoying gardening – reasons that may not be related to family, wildlife or the greater environment. Gardening is a self-centred activity that reinforces a sense of individual achievement, personal space and creativity.
- Other tangible benefits included the colour and beauty of gardens, having a useful, attractive outdoor area, and reaping vegetables or fruit.
- Overall, gardening provides a combination of benefits – physical, emotional, practical and aesthetic. The most popular benefits people talked about related to 'what you get of it' rather than 'what you put into it'.

### What does this mean for growers and retailers?

The most successful promotion themes on labels, signage and advertising are likely to relate to:

- The sense of achievement gardening provides;
- The sense of pride gardeners experience;
- Gardening as one of life's simple pleasures;
- Gardening as a way of creating something of beauty.



Customer newsletters are a great way to provide useful information and reassurance that gardening is one of life's great pleasures. Zanthorrea Nursery, WA.

### Industry accreditation is potentially valuable, but is not yet well known.

- Only 14% of people say they are aware of accreditation in the industry.
- Despite this, accreditation offers many potential benefits. When asked, people associated accredited garden centres with better staff, superior service, better plant health and quality.
- Accreditation will attract customers, but more people have to learn about it.

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Hampton Gardens in QLD use boulevard banners to tell their customers that they are AGCAS accredited.

### What does this mean for retailers and growers?

Retail (AGCAS) and production (NIASA) accreditation can provide you with marketing benefits, if you tell your customers and potential customers you are accredited and offer superior service, quality, knowledge and advice.

### Demand for gardening contractors is likely to increase.

At this point, one third of those surveyed have used contractors, mainly for general maintenance, rather than design work. Keener gardeners prefer not to use designers, not wanting others to “meddle” in their garden. Pride is at stake.

Younger and less skilled people, however, are more interested in design and gardening advice, suggesting future demand.

Garden centres and contractors are well positioned to take advantage of this demand.

### What does this mean for retailers?

You can significantly increase customer loyalty and sales by offering landscape design and/or maintenance services.

### What does this mean for growers?

You can benefit by ensuring your landscaper customers are well informed on the characteristics and range of your plants.

Garden Centre loyalty programs can be very successful, especially if they provide:

- Value for money;
- Positioning: “More than just a retailer”;
- Assistance to people who lack gardening knowledge or build confidence by providing extra advice and information;
- Creativity to make gardening more fun;
- Tailored appeal, to children or 1st home buyers, for example;
- A greater sense of personal achievement and gratification.

Garden Magic, in Narellan, NSW has built a successful loyalty program by adding value, not discounting. General Manager Jim Barr says:

*“It is not cheap to implement, but everything now revolves around the loyalty program. It has been absolutely sensational, more than doubling the size of the average sale. The average visit is also much longer, too, without sacrificing profits.”*

Features of the Garden Magic program include:

- 17,000 loyalty program members, with extensive data on member demographics and purchasing behaviour, being used for additional marketing.
- A points system based on the value of purchases, which can be redeemed within 60 days. All rewards are received at point of sale and are designed to encourage more activity, rather than providing discounts on existing sales.
- Spending at the on-site restaurant also generates loyalty points.
- Additional rewards such as special prize draws and special functions for members.
- A design consultation department with fulltime staff.
- Sponsorship by suppliers and other local businesses.



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This *Nursery Paper* was written by Mark Dignam, from Mark Dignam & Associates Pty Ltd.

### For more information

To get the complete consumer research study report, phone Horticulture Australia Limited, on 02 8295 2300, quoting project number NY02015.

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