



# Millennials in the garden

BY ELIZABETH PETERSEN



Ways to attract the newest generation of gardeners include offering unique plants such as succulents and cacti, as well as basic edibles, while making information readily accessible online.

**As Baby Boomers have retired and downsized, their long-standing financial support of the nursery industry has fallen off.**

**But a new generation of gardeners called Millennials is poised to pick up where Boomers left off – grabbing their shovels, growing their own food, decorating their spaces with plants and re-invigorating the nursery industry. >>**

## Millennials in the garden

Millennials are intrigued to learn new things and master the basics. They show up to workshops, like the ones held at Al's Garden Center (shown below). Workshop topics include creating your own holiday centerpiece, planting basics, how to overwinter tender plants and more. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

The changing of generations bodes well for both retail and wholesale plant purveyors, because Millennials value plants for their positive impact on health and the environment, indoors and out.

Plus, Millennials are a larger generation than Baby Boomers. Currently they comprise about one-quarter of the U.S. population and already have a collective buying power of \$200 billion annually, according to Katie Dubow of Garden Media Group. And the buying power of this younger generation will only increase as they age, buy houses, settle down and earn more money.

To meet the needs of Millennials, though, the industry needs to understand them: what they value, how they operate and the ways they communicate. By doing so, they can direct marketing and design retail shopping experiences more effectively.

### Who are Millennials?

The term “Millennials” applies to the first generation to reach adulthood in the 21st century. Born after 1980 and as old as 36 now, Millennials are quickly becoming the dominant demographic group among American consumers and are reaching their prime earning — and spending — years. Last year, in fact, five million of the six million “new” gardeners were 18–34-year-olds.

The 2017 Garden Trends Report, published by Garden Media Group, offered these important insights that help



explain what this generation wants from the green industry:

- Millennials appreciate outdoor, natural spaces and plants for their contributions to mental and physical health, since plants help provide fresh air, clean water and a connection with nature.
- Since they value clean, healthy and local sourcing, Millennials want organic/green solutions to soil health and fertility. They seek ways to support ecosystems and save the world.
- Millennials appreciate a less-is-more aesthetic, so they want big impact in small

spaces. Dwarf plants that produce crops of healthy, flavorful food (blueberries and herbs, for instance) allow Millennials to grow their own while also maintaining tidy spaces.

- New technology for indoor gardening appeals to Millennials, who want to grow indoors, under lights or in water year-round, 365 days a year.

- Millennials want to stand out from the crowd and express themselves in unique ways, so they value brands that allow them to personalize their spaces and gardens to match their individual quirks.

- As they build families, Millennials view gardening as a shared experience with their kids.

### All tech, all the time, all around

Technology-savvy Millennials engage with content an average of 18 hours per day and in new ways, Dubow said, which creates “even more touchpoints for garden businesses to reach them.”

Constantly connected, they want information, and they want it fast, in short, crisp, visually appealing and moving servings.

They also use digital devices to share pictures, inspiration and experiences, and



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**Efforts to create a gardening culture in the United States are being promoted by the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture ([consumerhort.org](http://consumerhort.org)) and Seed Your Future ([www.seedyourfuture.org](http://www.seedyourfuture.org)), both of which are good resources for the industry.**

they plan before they purchase, by reading and sharing reviews online.

“Millennials are driven by opportunities to create memories they can share. They will even pay more if it means they’ll have a ‘share-able’ experience,” Dubow said. “Make it easy for them to snap photos of potential purchases, and create vignettes in-store that are ‘Instagramable.’”

All this sharing makes Millennials influencers: they interact with everyone in their social sphere, including parents, friends, relatives and co-workers, on what brands and products to buy.


“For Millennials, the first step in the buying process is discussing potential pur-

chases or decisions with friends and digital fans via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, texts or Snapchat,” Dubow said. Sixty-six percent will look up a store on their phones.

Reaching Millennials on multiple platforms of social media, then, is essential for garden businesses. The place to start is with strong, frequently updated websites.

“The worst thing for marketing in the digital age is a bad website,” explained Jonathan Pedersen, Monrovia’s vice president of business development.

“Digital viewership is surpassing all other media,” Pedersen said, “but it is better to turn off a website than to have a bad one, since Millennials are ruthless when it comes to digital content.” ➤



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Monrovia's research found that 60 percent of consumers, especially Millennials, are extremely brand conscious. As a result, Monrovia has changed its marketing approach from advertising in magazines to taking the message directly to the appropriate demographic with targeted, cross-device digital marketing.

### Marketing to Millennials

Millennials feel uplifted and validated when followers like their selfies, tweets and posts, Dubow said, but they become uneasy and feel left out when not kept up-to-date with social happenings. Garden brands that cultivate a digital audience can tap into consumer insights and authentically engage with consumers. Brands should remember to "thank" fans by "liking" mentions of their products or store experiences.

This approach to marketing provides businesses with immediate feedback about the impact of their digital marketing, which allows them to quickly change messages based on customer response.

Targeted digital marketing allows Monrovia to identify potential customers by zip code and to help customers find plants they are searching for nearby.

"Geo-enabled" codes can identify where the customer is, provide directions to the closest garden center and even offer coupons instantly online.

They can also help potential customers by providing a mobile advantage: scannable codes on every tag can provide detailed, specific information about a given variety of plant.

Static, still-life images just don't make it anymore, Pedersen said. "All ads need to have movement," which doubles "click-through" rates.

Monrovia has launched a series of informational videos called "Know it. Grow it." The short, fast (less than one minute each) videos demonstrate a range of gardening basics from how to prepare soil to how to plant a shrub, a Japanese maple or a hanging strawberry basket. The videos "generate views quickly," Pedersen said, citing as an example seven million views of

## 5 tips for marketing garden brands to Millennials



### 1. Provide options to show off their style.

Carry as many colors, patterns and design variations of a product as possible. Even better, give them modular pieces that can shift with their mood.

### 2. Streamline purchasing.

41 percent of Millennials have already made purchases with their smartphones, and that number will continue to grow. Since Millennials always have their phones with them, buying is only a click away. Optimize your site to provide the best mobile experience possible, meaning everything done on your desktop site should be available in the mobile version. Add a one-click purchase feature like Amazon.com or some other form of e-commerce.

### 3. Share your knowledge.

Millennials are big DIYers who are just learning how to garden and are hungry for information. To establish yourself as a gardening expert and trusted friend, prepare a content marketing plan that can answer questions Millennials are asking about gardening. Start a blog, teach simple tips in Instagram videos, and answer all questions asked of your brand on social media.

### 4. Appeal to parents.

A record 36 percent of Millennials move back home after college, partly because of the economy and partly because it's now cool to be friends with Mom and Dad. To leverage this relationship and get Millennials in the garden, host digital or in-person workshops geared towards parents and their 20-something Millennials. Make these events fun, practical and straight to the point. Also, market to parents to make sure that when they recommend a garden brand, it's yours.

### 5. Focus on the future.

Having a trusted, long-term brand isn't enough to win over Millennials. This generation is more interested in what you can offer now, but also how you can make the future greener and cleaner. To refine your Millennial messaging, focus on long-term goals. Answer these questions about your brand with Millennials in mind: "Why is this important to me right now?" and "What can this product do for me in the future?"

*Adapted from 2017 Garden Trends Report by the Garden Media Group*



one video in just two weeks.

“Use content to inspire consumers, aid in planning and enable success,” he recommended.

Another crucial part of digital marketing is third-party endorsements. Blogs work well to get reviews for plants, so growers should connect with online garden writers. A garden-specific blog is OK, Pedersen said, but a family-and-homemaking blog draws a wider audience.

### Put in practice

Eve Hansen coordinates social media and events for Al's Garden Centers, which has three locations in the suburbs around Portland, Oregon.

Al's uses its website and other social media in a variety of ways to provide tips and inspiration from “Al's Experts,” who promote events and educate gardeners with video tutorials and growing guides.

Hansen also posts a weekly e-newsletter on Facebook, where she can track which demographic of customer views what notices and at what times of the day.

She posts current, relevant photos and videos to Instagram at least once a day, often two or three times a day, in an effort

to attract new viewers and target their viewing habits with appropriately timed reminders and notices.

In addition, Hansen posts to Pinterest and YouTube and uses a social media organizational app to help reach these media outlets simultaneously.

Her goal is to convince beginning gardeners that “they can totally do this,” she said. “People can be intimidated, but they are used to having access to all sorts of information at their fingertips, on their phones.”

Millennials also like hands-on events that provide information and socializing simultaneously, and workshops designed to match what is trending on Pinterest are very popular, Hansen said.

“Millennials are intrigued by learning to grow their own things, and they want to learn the basics. They show up to workshops with their phones in hand, and they come to the store with phones open to ideas they have found online.” ☺

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