

Plant Retailing – From Then to Now

Clive Larkman

Larkman Nurseries, 7 Jurat Rd, Lilydale VIC 3140, Australia

clive@larkmannurseries.com.au

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Summary

Major developments occurred to alter the way and reason why plants were grown and sold. Fresh vegetables and herbs became more easily available through development in suburban farming including greenhouse expansion, breeding but most importantly the evolution of large food retailers.

The ornamental value became as important as the food value of the variety. Gardening became a serious pastime and gardeners wanted ‘new’, ‘bigger’, ‘longer flowering’ plants that are tolerant of diseases, pests and other biotic stress factors. This paper describes changes in retail garden customers.

INTRODUCTION

Plants enable man to change from nomadic hunter/gatherer to settled community. The original cultivated plants were either food or medicinal as these were the key to the survival of fixed communities. Plants were

grown for use in the home and this remained the case for thousands of years.

Retail Customer Over time the average retail customer changed from the middle-aged male gardener to the 55+ female gardener. She chose the plants, and he carried

them, planted them and maintained them. The lines were well defined and plant retailing was targeted at elder women. In some countries they also became throw away items and once the flower or perfume ceased, they were dumped.

Garden Centres and Lifestyle Centers

Two trends brought about the ‘garden center’ or ‘lifestyle’ center’. In the early years nurseries in countries with extreme winters virtually shut down when the cold weather hit. However, a balanced income was needed, and it was apparent the nursery has to bring in many people who wanted to spend time looking at the plants. They turned into retailers who sell everything to do with life and living. The obvious items on sale were ponds, pets, tools, furniture and even clothing as well as not so obvious items like jewellery, soaps and perfumes.

To keep people there and returning again and again, many nurseries started to add cafes, some of which soon became destination restaurants. This resulted in a huge shift to the way gardens were viewed. Late in the century gardens became a key part of the house and the plant palette as the house and garden became one. People wanted greater variety of food than available in the shops and there developed a desire for ‘cleaner/greener’ plants. Thus evolved the desire for edimental plants – ornamental plants that are also edible. The palette moved back to edibles and younger people took an interest in their gardens. As a result, the typical customer changed to a 35- to 45-year-old couple. They looked at each purchase as a major issue that had to look good, have an edible use and they wanted the ‘story’.

Development History of Food and Flora Retailers

The desire for edible plants sent a whole new generation of people into the nurseries and garden centers. Western culture also developed a desire to go out to eat all meals or just sit and have a coffee or wine. Two trends that gave plant retailing a boost and many restyled their appearance.

Online Purchases of Plants

Online retailing was seen as the devil that would end the existence of retail nurseries. Fortunately, online purchases of plants don’t appeal to many gardeners and online plants helped bring even more people into nurseries. Recently the new generation of ‘millennials’ has seen an influx of quite young people into growing plants. They have a passion for trendy new (or old) indoor plants. They are computer savvy and are well researched on what species and variety they want; how rare it is and how to grow it.

From the first days of settlement the key to a healthier society has been the ability to grow and farm plants. Whether the plants are grown as source of food and medicine, as a way to beautify the home, impress friends or fill a need to collect and own things that others don’t, they need to be propagated. This could be through conventional seed sowing, modern asexual forms like cutting, grafting or division or through hi-tech micropropagation.

Growing plants is the key to a happy and healthy society. Whatever the reason it shows that plants and their propagation is essential to life.