



Advantages to being Independent

At a recent brainstorming session sponsored by [Today's Garden Center](#), keynote speaker Bob Jacobson, President of Garden Godfather, detailed some of the advantages independents have in the current economy.

- Flexibility in products and services to meet the varying needs of multiple neighborhoods.
- The ability to maintain staff to grant customers the time they need with trained employees.
- Staying consistent with appearance and presentation.
- The ability to attend seminars and provide continuing education on new varieties, hard goods products and regulation changes.
- Having multiple outlets for the customers, such as landscape design, maintenance and installation.
- The ability to build a personal relationship with the customer.
- The ability to continuously review the product mix to find and cut underperforming SKUs and order more of what works around the clock.
- Treating vendors as partners - and sometimes family - to work for continued success.
- The ability to continue advertising in the current economy, as well as have a quick turn-around to stay up with it.
- The ability to grow their own merchandise, which has never been a bigger advantage than in 2009

Jacobson feels the current economic landscape actually translates to a great time for independents, and that the opportunity for success has never been better.

Spring so Far

Comments from [Ian Baldwin, Garden Center Consultant](#) in the latest Green Profit newsletter:

- Veggie sales are double or more, and fruit trees are in very short supply.
 - The South is having a better-than-expected start if you compare traffic count and average spend with the last three months of 2008, which was the worst ever for many, especially back East.
 - Much price cutting is going on, but the sharp guys are only cutting on big-volume, known-value lines and the really sharp guys are increasing prices on a few lines such as organic veggies where the public has little price perception.
 - Everyone is thinking local and community these days, with more classes, open houses and gifts than in previous years.
 - Ian is urging his clients to Plant a Row For The Hungry and to establish a community garden on any spare bit of ground.
- “I think garden centers have a huge opportunity to offer customers items for self-gifting or the ‘I’d—n well deserve this’ item like a nice hanging basket, a \$29 jar of hand cream or a fragrant gardenia. My general phrase is that it is going to be a ‘Chicken Soup Spring’ with consumers buying safe, smaller and local,” Ian says.

Hosta of the Year is Earth Angel

The Hosta of the Year for 2009, as designated by [American Hosta Growers Association](#), is Earth Angel.

Selected by Shady Oaks Nursery in 2002, this sport of Blue Angel is one of the largest variegated hostas that you'll find. It produced large near-white flowers in June and July. It will take shade or part sun and makes an impressive specimen plant in any hosta-growing area of the country.

Now, selling one hosta is great. But why not take the time to build an "Award-Winning Hosta" display using all of the previous Hosta of the Year winners? That way your customers will want to take home all 13 instead of just one!

Previous winners of Hosta of the Year are:

- 1996 - So Sweet
- 1997 - Patriot
- 1998 - Fragrant Bouquet
- 1999 - Paul's Glory
- 2000 - Sagae
- 2001 - June
- 2002 - Guacamole
- 2003 - Regal Splendor
- 2004 - Sum and Substance
- 2005 - Striptease
- 2006 - Stained Glass
- 2008 - Blue Mouse Ears



Food Gardening to Go Up in 2009

This comes from the latest issue of the Green Profit newsletter from Ball Publishing.

According to The Impact of Home and Community Gardening in America Survey conducted this January by the National Gardening Association (NGA) and sponsored by Scotts Miracle-Gro, 7 million more Americans plan on growing their own fruits, vegetables, herbs or berries in 2009 than did so in 2008. That's a 19% increase over 2008. The increase from 2007 to 2008 was 10%. If these survey results hold true, we're in for a lot more customers looking for all things related to food gardening.

Here are some highlights from the survey:

- 43 million U.S. households plan to grow their own fruits, vegetables, herbs and berries in 2009, up 19% from 36 million households in 2008.
- 21% of households said they plan to start a food garden in 2009.
- 11% of households already active in food gardening plan to increase both the amount and variety of vegetables they will grow in 2009; 10% also said they will spend more time food gardening this year.

Considering the current economy, one surprising result from the survey is that just one in three respondents said they were motivated to grow their own food because of the recession. The respondents' other reasons include:

- 58%—for better-tasting food
- 54%—to save money on food bills
- 51%—for better quality food
- 48%—to grow food they know is safe

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