

# Consumer Horticulture Benefits for Businesses, Workplaces, and Employees



## Horticulture and plants can benefit businesses, improve workplaces and employee quality of life

- Businesses profit when landscapes attract customers to stores
- Landscapes and green roofs impact rental rates
- Trees increase perception of shopping areas and willingness to pay
- Plants in workplaces and nature views can improve satisfaction and productivity in the workplace

Consumer Horticulture is the cultivation, use, and enjoyment of plants, gardens, landscapes and related horticultural items to the benefit of individuals, communities, and the environment. These activities rely on the understanding and application of the art and science of horticulture. Consumer horticulture doesn't just impact our lives in terms of our homes, families, and communities. It also intersects with business and industry both in terms of the overall economy as well as the workplace environment that can improve the economic bottom line as well as the health and well-being of employees. In this publication we will focus on ways plants enhance the attractiveness of businesses and how their placement in the workplace may increase the productivity and wellbeing of employees.

## Business Benefits of Consumer Horticulture

It may be simple to see horticulture as a commercial enterprise that grows and sells live products<sup>10</sup> (the green industry) or more specifically the spending on do-it-yourself garden plants and products<sup>8</sup>. Often, this is the way horticulture is generally viewed in university and business institutions. However, the power of horticulture is not just in the sale of plants, but rather the connection of people with those plants. This point of intersection is where consumer horticulture resides.

- *Landscapes can attract visitors to retail stores*
- *Landscapes can impact retail or restaurant prices*
- *Trees can increase perception of shopping areas and consumer willingness to pay*

Horticulture consumers impact our economy and individual businesses in many ways that go beyond direct sales. The business of growing, designing, installing and maintaining residential landscapes can be connected to the end consumer. Thus, the design and management of lawns and landscaping for retail and commercial business sites attract the consumer, which can benefit the business profits.

Whether to directly attract consumers, enhance aesthetics to attract future clients, or recruit future employees, the business-service aspect of the commercial horticulture and landscape sector revolves around the consumer. Customers are known to form opinions about retail businesses based on external visual factors, so it is not surprising that landscaping and the aesthetics of the property can attract visitors and impact the prices at retail sites like restaurants<sup>6</sup>.



Streetscape trees, especially those with full canopies, can increase the perception and quality rating of shopping areas<sup>22</sup>. Interestingly, the quality of streetscapes in city centers could be used to gain competitive advantages over larger discount stores. Willingness to pay for a variety of products was over 9% higher in retail areas with high quality tree coverage, and shoppers were willing to travel further<sup>23</sup>.

In terms of real estate, consider that environmentally designed buildings, with plant components, such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified buildings, have been found to have 8% higher occupancy rates<sup>7</sup>. In New York, apartment buildings with green roofs had 16% higher rent rates<sup>11</sup>. Landscape had a positive effect on rental rates similar to the 3-6% seen in residential areas, but the quality and maturity of the landscape was an important component<sup>15</sup>.

Environmentally, there are a range of benefits of incorporating horticulture and green infrastructure. The benefits can sometimes extend to utility bills or tax credits as municipalities provide reward to businesses that help reduce stormwater management and other city costs<sup>4</sup>. Greening of commercial properties can also reduce energy demands and resulting cooling costs<sup>1</sup>. While initial costs of these green infrastructure amenities are often higher, the cost over the entire life-cycle can be lower due to longer lifespan or reduced maintenance costs<sup>4</sup>.

- *Green roofs can increase rent potential*
- *Landscapes can increase rental rates*
- *Green infrastructure can reduce energy costs*



## Workplace and Employee Benefits of Consumer Horticulture

Horticulture is increasingly recognizing the value of health, well-being, and quality of life value for consumers as a cornerstone of their businesses and sustainability<sup>9</sup>. There are many such human values for plants and horticulture in the workplace that benefit both businesses and individual employees. These have been described at different levels including well-being of the worker, the environment of the workplace and the image and efficiency or competitive power of the entire workplace<sup>21</sup>.

- *Plants in work areas and nature views can reduce anxiety*
- *Plants in indoor work environments can increase mood and air quality*
- *Plants in the workplace can improve ratings of supervisors and coworkers*

Workplaces that provide employees more opportunities to contact nature and plants, both outdoor and indoor, exhibited lower measures of total stress and higher general health, suggesting that purposeful inclusion of or access to horticultural plants could be an important component of workplace health initiatives<sup>14</sup>, along with the larger concepts of ecological design in businesses and workspaces<sup>16</sup>.



Ornamental plants have been integrated into workplaces for decades with many documented benefits<sup>19</sup>, but we still have much to learn about their impact<sup>21</sup>. Anxiety reduction can also be a benefit of both indoor plants and nature views<sup>3</sup>, along with possible reductions in sick leave when indoor plants were present<sup>2</sup>. Improved mood and air quality can result from plants in indoor environments<sup>12,25</sup>, although gender and other factors may be related to mood impacts<sup>20</sup>. Plants in the workplace have likewise been shown to improve the quality of life ratings of employees. Employees with office plants even rated their supervisors and co-workers higher than those without<sup>5</sup>.

The relationship of people and plants in the workplace ranges from creating a comfortable, personal space and improving the climate to a means to cope with boredom or fatigue. There are opportunities for enhancing creativity in the office or the overall workplace<sup>21</sup>. Plants in the workplace support an increase in productivity, and can benefit creative tasks over rote tasks<sup>20</sup>. A 12% increase in computer task speed as well as lower blood pressure was seen in windowless computer labs when interior plants were included<sup>17</sup>. Even in modern workplaces where lean practices are used and efficiency is paramount, the inclusion of plants is beneficial for satisfaction as well as productivity<sup>18</sup>.

While there are many potential benefits from plants being integrated in the workplace, accessing nature or viewing it from the office are both important. Views of less groomed areas with native grasses can actually be better for employees than highly groomed sights<sup>13</sup>. Trees, both their size and number, were one of the highest factors related to satisfaction with outdoor settings around a place of work, and even the sight of paths can be important to workers<sup>13</sup>. Being able to easily see these outdoor features was a large factor in satisfaction as well. Half of the employees were actually willing to assist in managing the nature around their work<sup>13</sup>. Research continues, but it is clear that plants are much more than just aesthetically pleasing and are valued for their appearance as well as their ecological and environmental contributions.

In conclusion, there is increasing evidence that incorporating plants into the retail environment influences the appeal of a particular business and may affect the customer's willingness to spend time in those areas. Plants in the workplace or views to exterior plantscapes or nature can increase worker productivity while decreasing elements of stress.



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The National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture (NICH) is a consortium of industry leaders who are promoting the benefits and value of horticulture. NICH brings together academia, government, industry, and nonprofits to cultivate the growth and development of a healthy world through landscapes, gardens and plants – indoors and out. The Mission of NICH is to grow a healthy world through plants, gardens, and landscapes.

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