

Young leaders thinking green

Steve Sheppard, from the Nursery and Garden Industry New Zealand, talks about promising new talent.

I had the pleasure of judging the Young Leaders Award for the Nursery & Garden Industry Australia recently and it's clear the next generation of horticulturists are thinking green.

Australia is blessed to be home to the amazing '202020 vision' campaign (www.202020vision.com.au), which advocates for 20% more green space in urban areas by 2020. This campaign has grown from an idea to advocacy bandwagon, with ever more people demanding green space in urban areas, offices, homes and public parks. The success of the campaign is based on the power of word-of-mouth... Volunteers talking to their friends, colleagues and families about the importance of green spaces and plants.

The biggest challenge facing the nursery and garden industry, as outlined by all three finalists, is plants are not seen as necessities in everyday life. These young superstars commented how it is not until plants are seen as 'needs' not 'wants' that people will demand quality and quantity, which will in turn make for healthier, happier lifestyles. The weekly spend on coffee – only enjoyed once, with its takeaway cup creating waste – could instead go towards a quality plant from the local garden centre, which has got to be better for you.

So, how do we go about changing people's behaviour? That's a question often discussed by nurserymen and garden retailers alike. Advertising provides quick, effective results, but is a short-term solution with high costs. Giving away plants is a nice idea, but people rarely care as much about freebies than if they'd paid for them with their hard-earned money.

The young leaders proposed the following solutions... Gardening workshops, community education, e-learning courses, council planning... the list went on! However, at the core of it all was people!

Winner Chantal Tenace established Garden Soirée, offering a range of professional horticultural services to help people improve and become masters of your garden and outdoor living area. The objective being to get people involved in their gardens and local community by increasing their understanding of gardening principles and implementing sustainable changes.

By connecting with the community, Chantal has grown her business and with it developed a core group of long-term customers and garden and green-space advocates. "If people take the time to show you how to do something, they will likely enjoy and more importantly benefit from it." Another finalist Nicole Acworth created *Blooming in Brisbane*, a 30-minute gardening television show, which she writes, presents and produces. Nicole recognised the need for a gardening show that showcased local plants that would grow well in Queensland. As a passionate 'greenie' the show included 'Plant Life Balance' segments encouraging people to surround themselves with more plants.

As keen gardeners you can do your part, too. Share your love of gardening with others, build their interest then show them how. Their development will be incredibly rewarding, and you'll most likely end up with some home-grown fruit and veges and beautiful flowers from their gardens.

