

by Ellen C. Wells  
wellsellen@comcast.net

Perhaps Crosby, Stills & Nash put the idea into their minds years ago when they sang about getting “back to the garden.” Or maybe it’s a lifestyle change that comes with time and age. Whatever the reason, Baby Boomers are headed outdoors and into their yards, and having an impact on garden retail.

According to the article “Garden Market Forecast: Unseasonably Hot with Extended Sunny Skies and Rising Sales” by Pam Danziger, president of Unity Marketing and author of “Let Them Eat Cake: Marketing Luxury To The Masses – As Well As The Classes,” one reason for the shift is that the age of “cocooning” is dead. A trend first identified by Faith Popcorn, well-known trend spotter and forward-looking marketer, “cocooning” was the period from the 1980s to the new millennium where people retreated into their own homes during leisure times for privacy or escape.

Now, Danziger says, consumers are emerging from their domiciles and “turning away from the overt materialism that characterized the cocooning trend.” Instead of cocooning, consumers are “connecting” – with each other and with the outdoors. They are now focusing on what’s outside – gardens, lawns, patios – and connecting more with their neighborhood and the people around them, Danziger adds.

### Crunching The Numbers

The attention Baby Boomers once paid to decorating their homes’ interiors is now turned to the exterior. And while the Baby Boomers aren’t the only people outdoors enjoying their gardens



Baby Boomers are climbing out of their cocoons and looking for upscale products to furnish their back yards.

# Gardening Through The Ages: The Boomer Consumer

Baby boomers are headed ‘back to the garden.’

and patios, they are the ones with the money to spend. According to a 2003 demographic profile of Boomers (as defined as being born between 1946-1964) from the MetLife Mature Market Institute, this group has an estimated annual spending power of approximately \$1 trillion and represents just more than 27 percent of the U.S. population.

The National Gardening Association (NGA) in Burlington, Vt., has looked into the spending habits

of gardeners and found that Boomer consumers are indeed making an impact on the garden market. According to the NGA’s 2004 National Gardening Survey, roughly 82 million households take part in lawn- and garden-related activities. Of that number, 33.6 million, or 41 percent,

are in the age range of 35-54, which includes a majority of the Baby Boomer years. As a comparison, the age group of 55 and over represented just 33 percent of the active gardening households.

Consumer expenditures on do-it-yourself lawn and garden products – items such as plant materials, seeds, bulbs, garden tools and power equipment, fertilizers, pesticides and so forth – totaled \$38.4 billion for 2004. Of that, the 35-54 age group spent \$17.7 billion, a 46 percent share of the market. While the average lawn and garden consumer spent \$449 last year, the Baby Boomer crowd spent more than \$500.

Another important series of numbers to consider are the consumer expenditures on professional lawn and garden services, such as lawn, tree, and landscape maintenance, installation, construction and design. The total expendi-



ture on these services for 2004 was \$31.3 billion, which, according to the NGA, continues a 13 percent annual growth rate over the last five years. The 35-54 year olds accounted for 40 percent of the total, with the 55 and older crowd representing 43 percent. Considering older consumers would likely need more assistance with maintenance activities, the now-high percentage of maintenance and service spending by Boomers foretells of the great potential in this service market as the Boomers age.

### Where They're Coming From

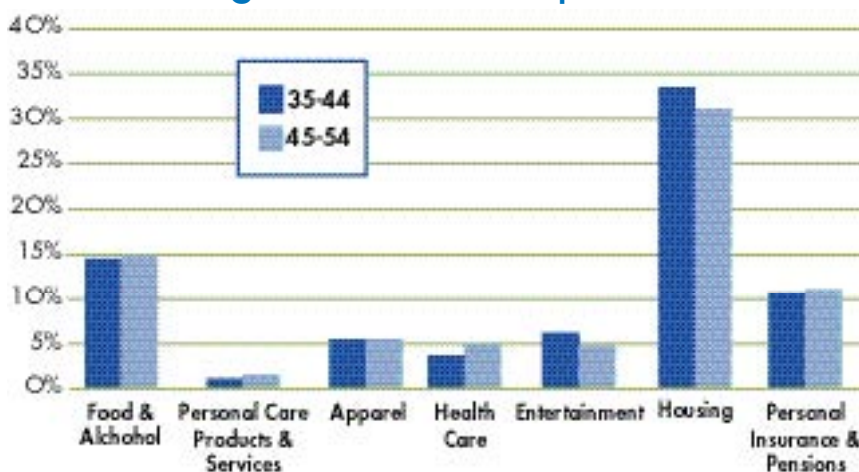
"I've noticed some people are genetically programmed to get into gardening as they get gray hair," jokes Bruce Butterfield, market research director for NGA. With more than 25 years conducting research at the NGA, Butterfield notices trends within the gardening community as he crunches the numbers. He's also taken note of the Baby Boomers and how they are gardening at this time in their lives. With children old enough to do their own thing or head out on their own, Boomers are now freed up to spend some time on themselves and their gardens, Butterfield notes.

Coming into their own in the late 1960s and 1970s, Butterfield also notices Boomers look to maintain their lawns and gardens in a more environmentally friendly way. Data from the NGA's first ever Environmental Lawn & Garden Survey support this. People in the age groups of 45-54 and 55 and over scored 49 percent on the environmental test, with the national average being 42 percent.

Danziger's research points to the same conclusions. According to her Garden Market Forecast, Boomers "connecting" with their environments are driving the demand for organic gardening solutions and are seeing what other alternatives exist for traditional lawns, which could be wildflower meadows and natural grasses. "Today, garden marketers need to focus on the needs, desires and passions of the emerging gardening consumers," Danziger says.

"Time is a factor, as is low maintenance," Butterfield says in regard to other Boomer trends. While more time is available with children out of the home, today's fast-paced world means finding ways to get the job done in order to move on to another activity. And make it

## Average Consumer Expenditures



easy, too, Butterfield adds. "More "how-to" info needs to be available to them, because Baby Boomers don't want to feel handicapped in what they are doing," he says. And with the Baby Boomer group being so highly educated, their "need to know" is understandable. "Lots of people aren't shy about learning how to design gardens. They want more information."

### Not Just Plants Anymore

According to the Outdoor Living Report 2005 from Danziger and Unity Marketing, outdoor living hardware – e.g. equipment and supplies, furniture and the like – had a 36 percent share of the outdoor living market for 2004. Compare that to 30 percent for "software" (plants, etc.) and 34 percent for outdoor living services such as lawn and garden maintenance. Danziger finds that as Boomers emerge from their cocoons, they will drive demand for stylish and decorative outdoor furniture and other decorations.

She also believes Boomers will extend their interests in vegetable and herb growing, tying that into their love of gourmet cooking. Outdoor cooking and dining will fit right into their new outdoor living lifestyle. And with the buying power of the Baby Boomer generation, that means fully functioning outdoor kitchens complete with refrigeration, storage, prep space, as well as the dinnerware and accessories for outdoor use. Extend the season with heating lamps. Take cover under customized tents. Lounge in comfortable, weather-resistant furniture, changing the fabric for each season. Outdoors, the sky truly is the limit.

"The outdoors is the new indoors," Danziger says. "The garden center has to think beyond the "green box" to the totality of the outdoor living market." TGC

Ellen C. Wells is a writer, editor and marketing communications specialist with Pen and Petal. She is based in Boston, Mass., and can be reached at [wellsellen@comcast.net](mailto:wellsellen@comcast.net).

## In the Garden



Wear Foxgloves  
Get Results!

FOXGLOVES

888.322.4450

[foxglovesgardengloves.com](http://foxglovesgardengloves.com)

For Details Circle No. 11 on Postcard