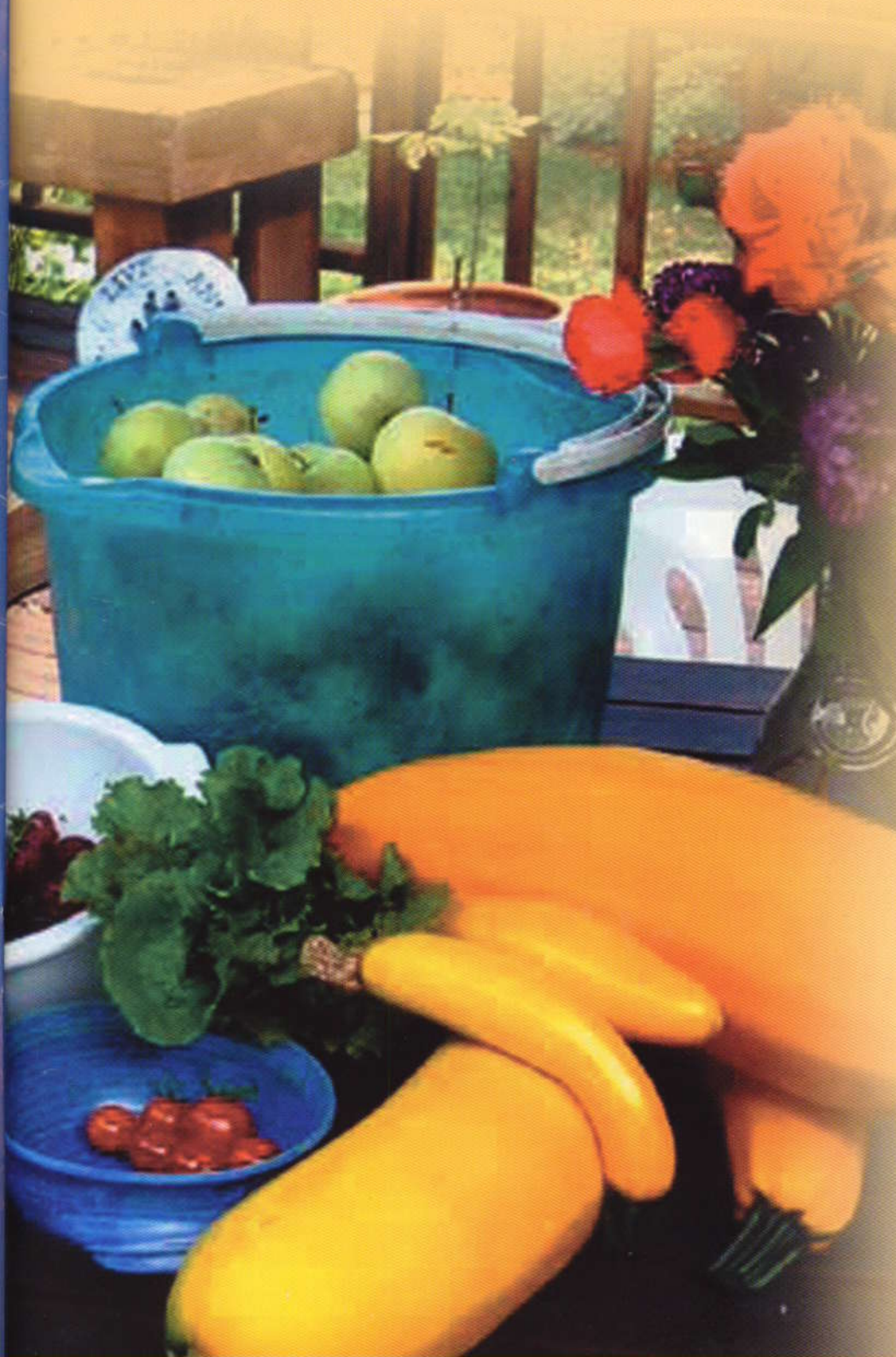


How to translate the success of the organic food movement to the Lawn and Garden Market in your Store.

“Make a Statement”

By Annie Joseph CCN Pro



*I*n the past few years, we have seen a steady increase in the market share of organic foods in our neighborhood stores. They have gone from niche market to mainstream. An ever-increasing number of households are looking for ways to positively affect their quality of life and their health. In the same way, they want to protect their children and pets, and still have beautiful gardens.

For the Lawn and Garden Market, there is a large opportunity to translate those interests into the actual practice of natural gardening. Consumers may want to use natural methods in their gardening, but still have some reservations.” Where do I find natural products? What can I expect from using these products? Do they really work? In this article we will discuss the growing consumer interest in healthier gardening practices.

In a survey conducted in late 2004 by the “Our Water Our World” program, a water pollution prevention program in California, the following questions were asked of shoppers at local Bay Area nurseries and hardware stores. These were open ended response that had multiple answers .

A question was asked if they were going to buy a less toxic product today. The question that followed was:

“Why are you motivated to purchase a less toxic product?”

The top three in respective order were Health and Human Safety, Environmental Concern, and Pet Safety.

If they were not motivated to purchase that day what would motivate them to do so? 7

The top answer by a large margin was a Safer Product Method. The following 3 answers came in very close to each other, lead slightly by price, faster product method, and need for a product.

An additional question was asked if the promotional materials that highlighted the less toxic products helped them to make a decision on what to buy. The answer was yes, 65% that recognized the promotional materials said that it helped them identify less toxic products to use.

How can we grow this category and make it more profitable for our stores?

Easy, clear access to products is key.

The number one goal is to make it stand out and to designate a space in your store for natural products. Why?

Because it defines a concept, and offers a clear choice to the consumer.

It makes it easier for staff to locate the products, and to help the consumers find them when the staff is too busy to help.

For those stores that are leery of taking a product out of a section for instance that is dedicated to fungicides and putting it only in the natural section, they can opt to have one facing for that product in the regular lineup of products and a larger representation in the natural section.

I have been working with the "Our Water Our World" program the past nine years beginning as a volunteer and trainer and now working with water pollution prevention agencies and businesses looking to be profitable and environmentally conscientious. One of the services we provide is a list of all the known less toxic products that are on the market in California. This list is updated yearly. The product list has increased 79% since 2003. Clearly there is increasing consumer demand.

One of the most frequent questions I am asked by consumers is "How do I find what product will work on my pest problem and will be safer to use around my family and pets?"

They are interested but are overwhelmed at times trying to hunt through the shelves at a store searching for a less toxic product. Tagging the products with shelf talkers has been helpful in the "Our Water Our World" program but I sense the consumers are now looking for the next step.

That next step is not only a clearly defined section for natural products, it's trained, confident staff that that can help people make the transition into using them.

Trained, confident staff ensure customer trust and repeat business.

An integral piece to staff training on natural gardening is to set up the customer with the right expectations.

Using organic fertilizers and less toxic products for pest problems have different patterns of performance that need to be explained to the customer.

It's important to tell the customer that organic fertilizers take a longer time to become available to the plant so they do not expect overnight results.

When they are using an iron phosphate bait for slugs and snails it is important to tell them the slugs and snails discontinue feeding immediately then go away to die. Then they are not disappointed when they do not see the piles of dead snails where they applied the bait.

Explaining these patterns of performance set the customer up with the right expectations so they do not abandon the natural gardening practices.

The time is right to stand out and make a statement. Our customers are looking for leadership and confidence to stand behind this growing category. Make your garden center the Whole Foods go to place for all your customers' natural gardening needs.

Come by the OWOW booth at the dealer show to get free POP material from the manufacturers of less toxic products.

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