

Trends in the Japanese Horticulture Industry & Takamatsu Company's Sales Strategy, SO EASY

Hidemi Takamatsu

General Manager and Owner, Takamatsu Co., Ltd. Japan

Trends in the Japanese Horticulture Industry

- The market size of the horticulture industry in Japan began to decline after 2000, and the environment surrounding commercial flower growers, who had previously lived a "whatever you make sells" lifestyle, changed dramatically. One of the major factors is the aging of consumers and the problem of developing a market for young consumers.
- According to the results of a survey by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the amount of money spent on flowers by a single household in 2019 decreased by 27% compared to 2000, and in particular, households in their 20s and 30s decreased by 67%.
- Why have young people stopped buying flowers? According to the survey results, the main reasons were not knowing the varieties, being afraid of failure, troublesome maintenance, and lack of space. (Price is not much of an issue.)



Table 1. People who bought plants in the past year

Ages	Male	Female
20s	9.9%	13.2%
30s	11.9%	14.1%
40s	13.2%	18.3%
50s	16.5%	25.9%
60s	30.4%	44.6%
All ages	16.7%	23.4%

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries survey, 2019, target 20,000 people.

Table 2. Reasons for not buying plants

20s	60s
Don't know the varieties	18%
Afraid of failure	17%
Don't know how to care	15%
Troublesome maintenance	13%
Lack of space	11%
Can't dispose	10%
Expensive	10%
Expensive	20%
Afraid of failure	18%
Don't know the varieties	14%
Troublesome maintenance	12%
Don't know how to care	9%
Can't dispose	7%
Lack of space	5%

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries survey, 2019 target 20,000 people.

Problems

- In the United States, Independent Garden Centers (IGC) would play a role in solving such problems and dissatisfaction. They have created a system that allows gardening beginners to visit their stores and teach the basics of how to enjoy plants without making mistakes.

- However, IGCs target gardening manias, and are a high hurdle for new gardening beginners.
- Japanese IGCs also view Big Box stores as rivals. Even if they purchase the same variety of plants from growers, their purchase price is higher than that of Big Box stores, and the selling price is inevitably higher. This is not a competitive situation, so in order to make a profit, they prefer varieties that "look good" rather than varieties that "perform well". And such varieties are often difficult for gardening beginners to handle.
- Japanese growers also practice growing and shipping varieties that "look good" in order to get a higher price on the market, and this trend has not changed since ancient times.

The Concept of SO EASY

- In addition, many houses in Japan have problems such as small gardens, small space around the entrance, and poor sunlight. Many people also live in small apartments.
- Since the gardening industry has targeted with good environments until now, the market for such difficult environments is almost untouched and a blue ocean.
- The varieties that gardening beginners can easily purchase without fear, the varieties that can be easily enjoyed in Japanese living environments. We at Takamatsu company have been focusing on modern consumer needs from early on, and in order to solve these problems, we are developing plants that are known by everyone, do not die, are easy to care for, and can be enjoyed in a small space. We have named this group of plants "SO EASY".
- We want people to enjoy beautiful flowers in any environment and live a rich life. If many people can easily enjoy plants and feel



happy, this will lead to an expansion of the market, and we can also benefit.

How to Select SO EASY Varieties

• Sustainable Plant Appearance

➤ It can be said that vigorous plants are efficient because they can be produced in a short period of time, but we look for varieties that can maintain just the right volume when actually planted. The evaluation criterion is the ability to maintain a "just right" plant appearance, neither dwarf nor vigorous.

• Flowers Bloom Well and for A Long Period of Time

➤ Although there are varieties that bloom beautifully with a single flower: in order to enjoy them for a long time without any hassle, we select varieties that bloom one after another and have a high rate of continuous flowering, and look for varieties that remain "beautiful".

• Beautiful After Flowering

➤ If the dead petals become noticeable after the flowers bloom, it will be impossible to maintain a beautiful state. We look for "easy" varieties that do not require much effort, such as varieties that can be self-clean so that the petals fall off with the wind naturally, and varieties where the next flower grows on top of the old flower.

• Heat Resistant

➤ As global warming progresses, the summer heat in Japan is becoming more and more intense. In addition, the glare from the asphalt is strong. We will evaluate robust varieties that continue to bloom even under such harsh conditions.

• Excellent Disease Resistance

➤ No matter how beautiful a flower is, it is meaningless if it is weak

to diseases and cannot be enjoyed for a long time. By conducting trials in an environment where chemical sprays are not used, we will repeatedly test and evaluate how much better the disease resistance is than that of native varieties.

Trial Garden

- In order to find plants that fit the SO EASY concept, we have been ordering 500-600 different kinds of plants from suppliers and breeders around the world for the past 10 years and conducting trials.
- At the request of Kashiwa City, our local city government, we have been continuing the trial garden in a municipal park in Kashiwa City for the past 4 years.
- In order to allow local residents, especially children, to enjoy new and beautiful flowers up close, the trial garden is set up in the center of the park and is always in sight of visitors.
- A plan is underway to plant plants selected in the trial garden in 660 parks in Kashiwa City and in the gardens of public schools in the city.

Takamatsu School

- As mentioned above, many Japanese IGCs and growers have had unchanging stereotypes since ancient times, which has led to the decline of the Japanese horticulture industry. In order to reset the perception of the entire industry, a place for the Japanese IGCs and the Japanese growers to study was needed.
- However, the scale of the Japanese horticulture industry is very small, and there are no horticulture consultants. Government-run agricultural cooperatives provide guidance on production methods, but not on marketing.



- Therefore, Takamatsu company started holding study sessions for the Japanese IGCs and the Japanese growers in 2008.
- Every year, we invite successful IGCs, growers, and horticulture consultants from around the world to be lecturers and learn new ways of thinking to develop the future of Japan's horticulture industry. It has now become the largest study session for the industry in Japan.

Social Contribution Activities

- As a sign of gratitude to the society that allows us to live in such a favorable environment, we actively participate in community service activities. We believe that participating in such activities is the duty of those who live in a favorable society, and we are also working hard on PR activities so that many people can participate.
- Specifically, we have been working as a supporting company for Save the Children Japan since 2005. A portion of the sales of all our products are donated to the organization, and through this, we support children in difficult situations around the world.
- Japan's gardening industry has declined due to its selfishness and lack of consideration for consumers. Our activities have given the industry in Japan an opportunity to reconsider their attitude towards consumers.
- In addition, some IGCs are also using the Save the Children program for events such as "Children's Day" now.