

Tools: Ease of the Squeeze

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Many folks are unfamiliar with the word “ergonomic.” It comes from two Greek words: “ergon,” meaning “work,” and “nomos” meaning “laws.” Today, it’s the applied science of equipment design, intended to reduce fatigue and maximize productivity. In the lawn and garden (L&G) industry, manufacturers have developed many new products and designs to assist homeowners and professionals. Those who combine form and function—designs that are both colorful and comfortable—are among the most successful in the current marketplace.

Some retailers are quick to dismiss these types of tools as a passing fad. Dig deeper, though, and it’s clear that comfort is a trend that’s here to stay.

Comfort and Convenience Matter!

First, let’s take a look at the economics: Ergonomic and other well-designed tools often sell at premium prices. According to the L&G industry’s largest manufacturer, more than 75% of total chemistry sales involve convenient, timesaving products. Over the past 40 years, I’ve certainly noticed the shift from chemical concentrates to pre-mixed, ready-to-use products. Consumers also have more delivery methods to choose from today, including battery-powered spreaders, power sprayers and pull-and-spray goods.

Reducing aches, pains and strain isn’t limited to gardening. Beyond our market, think of ergonomic chairs, keyboards, computer mice, door handles, cookware and all of the power-assisted products in our lives today. High volumes plus high price points add up to big sales potential.

Next, consider the demographics: Who’s buying all this stuff? The customers who can—and are willing to—make these investments are often aging Baby Boomers. As this segment contends with muscle fatigue and other chronic conditions like arthritis, ergonomic and convenience-oriented tools enable these customers to continue gardening when traditional tools and methods become too physically demanding. Prolonging the fun of gardening is good for them and critical for us.

Pruner Design 101

We’ve come a long way from the simple scissor, which required sharp blades and firm grip to master garden tasks. Although trimming tools have been known in Asia for hundreds of years, a French aristocrat named Antoine Francois Bertrand De Molleville is said to be the inventor of the modern-day secateurs back in 1819.

You’re likely familiar with several common pruner designs including anvil, bypass, ratchet and parrot-beak styles. Anvil pruners bite in one direction using a straight blade and allow the user to swivel the pruner head to cut through larger branches. Bypass pruners work together so that the two blades pass by each other; they have one or two blades (concave or curved) to assist in grabbing the branch. Ratchet types were developed to easily cut larger-diameter stems and limbs; less strength is required to gain leverage for these larger cuts. Parrot-beak pruners use two concave passing blades that trap a stem between them to make a cut. This style is mostly used for narrow stems and light pruning.

Some of the best-known tool manufacturers in our industry, serving both hobbyists and professionals, have ergonomic design as a focal point in their product development. Felco and Corona are two examples that offer quality products designed with comfort and efficiency.

Find the Right Mix

When building your retail offer, it’s easy to become overwhelmed by the range of pruner styles and designs available. One size doesn’t fit all and you should offer a varied product selection to meet consumer needs, but don’t feel like you have to stock one of everything. Talk with your supplier about the products available and ask them about ergonomic styles. Take a look at your current lineup and identify any major gaps, then consider options for filling them in. You’ll soon squeeze out some new sales with ease! **GP**

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