



Retail Business Services

Culture in Action: Growing our Green Thumbs

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As many associates have remained homebound during the global pandemic, a small group within Retail Business Services, the services company of Ahold Delhaize USA, stepped up to bring the great outdoors into their colleagues' living rooms. Rodney Cummings, Systems Analyst and founder of the Flower Pots & Garden Spots Culture in Action (CiA) team, described how the weekly gathering brought spots of color to those craving a change.

"We had a few people who joined us who lived in apartments, so I put Microsoft Teams on my phone so that I could walk around my garden and show the outdoors to people who found themselves stuck inside a small apartment," he said. "We also have people who will go out on local trails or visit gardens in their area and share with the group. It's been really beneficial to me, as well, to have that social interaction during the pandemic because even though I'm not stuck in an apartment, I'm out in the countryside with not many people to interact with."

Flower Pots & Garden Spots is one of Retail Business Services' recently launched Culture in Action (CiA) teams, which serves as a new outlet for associates to engage with teammates and bond over common interests and hobbies regardless of location.

Each week, the group gathers to talk about gardening, their favorite plants, and all things green and growing.

"We talk about our passion for gardens we show off what we're growing," Rodney said. "We have a garden focus with questions like, 'What's a good place for this particular plant?' or 'What's a good plant for this particular place?'"

But gardening isn't one-size-fits-all.

"We have someone using grow lights in their basement," Rodney said. "And we have someone gardening on a third-story balcony."

There's no wrong way to garden; the important thing is to start. Rodney himself started gardening in containers on an apartment balcony many years ago.

"I always used to tell people that I had land, but it was always in buckets," he said with a chuckle.



Now, Rodney stewards several acres of his father-in-law's property, and he has worked hard to turn the compacted clay ground into rich topsoil. He was inspired to start gardening by his grandfather who had a strong green thumb.

"My grandfather had his garden for 85 years. He lived to be 100," he said. "I always thought that maybe there's a secret to getting out in your garden – not just eating the vegetables but getting out and working it."

Rodney's favorite thing is going outside and showing others what he's working on – like unique varieties of tomato and squash, or his current project of trying to create an okra hybrid that's Clemson orange in honor of his favorite sports team.

"I just like being outside and watching stuff grow and creating new varieties of various shapes and sizes and watching people react to them," he said. "I also love seeing and sharing the different types of blooms, the various types of flowers, the beauty of the blooms even on the vegetables. A lot of people were surprised to see that okra had large white flowers with a beautiful rosette center. Or the size of squash blooms – as big as your hand. And the size of the sunflowers this year – bigger than my head."

Group members also help each other to identify pests and diseases, as well as any unknown plants and flowers that they encounter. The group has a growing Wiki full of useful information, ideas and instructions, such as how to build a raised bed or root plant cuttings. Rodney said he also encourages members to share seeds through the mail.