

## Marketing Munchie Podcast Transcript

### Episode 3: Plant Benefits with Dr. Charlie Hall

**Announcer:** Welcome to the *Marketing Munchie* podcast series hosted by Dr. Bridget Behe. Each week, Bridget and her desks will share information insights, research-based findings and her 30 years of experience to help your horticultural business connect better with current and future customers. Now, let's join our host, Dr. Bridget Behe.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** With me today is Dr. Charlie Hall, professor in Ellison Endowed chair holder at Texas A&M University. Charlie's been an old friend and colleague for many years, and I wanted him to be my first guest on my podcast. Today, Charlie and I want to talk a little bit about his work gathering eco-system services and health, and well-being benefits. Charlie, tell me a little bit about the article that you and Medellin Dickson did a few years ago.

**Dr. Charlie Hall:** Oh my goodness. Where do I start? Because one of the things I've noticed is I've worked in the green industry for several decades now, even as a young kid growing up on nurseries, that we don't really have a good feel as an industry for all the benefits that we provide to society and individual people. That prompted me to really just take a step back and to look at all the ways in which we benefit society, because I noticed that the demand for flower, shrubs, and trees wasn't what it used to be. Baby boomers bought a lot of flowers, shrubs, and trees but that has been declining over time.

**Dr. Bridget:** Yes, creating a big problem for the industry.

**Dr. Charlie Hall:** Absolutely. What I wanted to do was come up with a new value proposition for the industry and that new value proposition centered around the benefits of plants. It looked at the economic benefits of plants, and the health and well-being benefits of plants, as well as the ecosystem services benefits that they provide. Had a student that was interested, so the timing was right, so we collected all the literature that we can find.

We searched far and wide and we found at the time over 450 different research citations talking about the benefits of plants. The interesting thing, Bridget, is that great a little that research was paid for by the horticultural industry itself.

**Dr. Bridget:** That's pretty surprising Charlie.

**Dr. Charlie Hall:** I know. It came from the health industry and the medical field, and so forth.

**Dr. Bridget:** So they were all investigating what plants do for humans and our industry wasn't aware of it and hadn't been using it.

**Dr. Charlie:** I know. Go figure. It was a conundrum. We'd always been doing research about the economic benefits and some of the consumer welfare oriented aspects of plants

and so forth, but this was stuff that we had never really encountered before. We knew that for every dollar you invest in landscape you get a dollar or nine return on investment.

That came from our own research but what we had not found before is that whenever a homeowner puts in and improve landscape or you have an improved landscape in the city, and a kid with ADHD takes a 20 minutes stroll in that improved landscape, it has the same neurological effects as two of their medications. That's what I'm talking about.

Then obviously, there are a number of families who have loved ones who are suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's, and that's one of the best treatments for dementia and Alzheimer patients is to outside in improved landscapes. That either in the gardening or landscaping activity is very therapeutic for those folks. You see a lot of hospitals now incorporate healing gardens as part of their offerings to the people that are at the hospital.

Here is a side benefit, not only does it benefit the patients but they find reduced turnover in stress levels on the part of the staff, the nurses, and the doctors that work at those hospitals as well.

**Dr. Bridget:** Wow, that's amazing.

**Dr. Charlie:** It's a widespread benefit. Then there's a whole lot of benefits to society in terms of reduced crime rates. What we used to think is that if you had a lot of shrubberies for bad guys to hide behind they increase the crime rate, not so. The city of Philadelphia has saved millions of dollars when they took all the vacant lots and they added improved landscapes, community gardens and those vacant lots, and they brought people from the inside to the outside, and it had more eyes on the street.

In generational conversations going on so forth crime rates reduced. They spent less money on police cars. They hired fewer police people whenever they started with their green movement within the city, then with the great infrastructure that they had typically been putting in a lot of pavement so forth. I mean, benefits we haven't really discovered before.

**Dr. Bridget:** What were some of the environmental benefits that you uncovered?

**Dr. Charlie:** That was phenomenal. Not only do plants create oxygen that we need to breathe, but you're obviously reducing erosion, and in the cities, the glare reduction. Glare pollution is one area that has just now been investigated on the part of scientists, and so plants do a lot in terms of mitigating that glare, reducing storm water run-off. The city spend millions of dollars putting in redundant storm water piping and all that great infrastructure goes into place that may not even be used unless there's a significant rainfall.

**Dr. Bridget:** They rain a bit.

**Dr. Charlie:** Exactly. Cities have saved millions of dollars by implementing green infrastructure in their cities and reducing that storm water run-off.

**Dr. Bridget:** You're in the process of revising that and collecting more recent ecosystem services and health and well-being benefits, aren't you?

**Dr. Charlie:** I am and here is a great thing, it's that remember I mentioned earlier, we've found 450 research citations. Well, that was back in 2011, we wrote that article in 2012 and it includes everything up until 2011. Since then, now our database has expanded over 2,000 research citations. The studies have been done on the benefits of plants and again, very little of that paid by the green industry itself but by other fields. Say you're the architectural field, your green roofs and green walls are being utilized in many parts of the country and adding a lot of value.

Here is an interesting thing, in our DC report that looked at the value of those benefits over time. If you add a green roof and you add a bio-soil and permeable pavement, and trees, and shrubs around say apartment complex or office building, or a retail store, that the value of that landscape – let's say you spend \$25,000 on that landscape, for example, to install it, over a 40-year time frame, and you talk about those benefits, the economic and environmental benefits, and the health and well-being benefits, or those that are in that vicinity, then all of a sudden that \$25,000 landscape transforms itself into a multi-million dollar landscape in terms of the benefits derived.

That's the thing in our industry is that we have always looked at landscapes in terms of the cost of installing them not in terms of their crude benefits of that landscape over the long run.

**Dr. Bridget:** Yes. Here is an investment that appreciates in value, not depreciates in value.

**Dr. Charlie:** Absolutely. Even taking to account that landscapes may get overgrown and you got to put labouring in and maintain those things, and you may have to take some plants out and stuff, even taking that consideration, the long-term benefits, the value of those, so you put them in present-day dollars, far, far exceeds the cost of putting those landscapes in. We're probably we're the greatest benefits to the society and yet we are a best-kept secret.

**Dr. Bridget:** That's my next question. How could businesses put some of this really cool research-based information you've accumulated, amassed and pulled together, how could they put that into practice?

**Dr. Charlie:** One of the things that I recommend folks do is look at their marketing and advertising strategies, and incorporate some of this messaging into the retail displays. We need to teach consumers these messages and in our marketing efforts, we need to include this messaging. We not only need to talk about how this plant blooms all summer or the beautiful aspects of these plants, but we need to talk about these benefits.

If everyone did that, it would have an even bigger impact than milk, the Goat milk campaign or the Beef what's for dinner campaign. Because what's interesting about those generic advertising campaigns is that consumption after the campaign is over with tends to fall back to where it was. Though if each individual business it contains some of these

marketing messages or some of these benefits messages in their marketing programmes, then it has a much greater impact. It just takes each individual business incorporating these messages in their advertising.

**Dr. Bridget:** So if they all put it on their website, the back of the employee t-shirt, on signs and any kind of contact they have with consumers, as educators we know you've got to repeat the message several times before it sinks in. Yes. I think this is great research. Charlie, if my listeners want to get some more information or get access to this, they can find it on your Ellison Chair website?

**Dr. Charlie:** Absolutely. In fact, it's a simple-google search is there. Search on Ellison Chair, thanks to CNN, it's the first thing that pops up. It's [ellisonchair.tamu.edu](http://ellisonchair.tamu.edu). There's a Benefits of Plants button. If they click on the button, it'll take them to not only all the resources that we collected, but it has separate different other sites that have different universities, and different non-profits that have collected a lot of other Benefits of Plants information. It's not just about what I collect, it's that I want to be a clearinghouse, and so that's a nice, little clearinghouse.

**Dr. Bridget:** But you've been kind of a touch point to have access to all that information, and I think that's something that a lot of businesses will benefit from. Well, I will put a link on Connect to Consumer to your website so the listeners can get that additional information. Thanks for being my first guest on Connect to Consumer.

**Dr. Charlie:** Thanks, Bridget. Great talking with you.

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**Speaker 1:** Thank you for joining us on this week's Marketing Munchie Podcast. For more information or to download a transcript of this podcast, please visit [connect-2-consumer.org](http://connect-2-consumer.org). That's C-O-N-N-E-C-T dash the number two dash C-O-N-S-U-M-E-R dot c-o-m.