

Chapter 22.

Merchandising



Merchandising is any practice which contributes to the sale of products to a retail consumer. At a retail level, merchandising refers to the variety of products available for sale and the display of those products in such a way that it stimulates interest and entices customers to make a purchase. Successful merchandising will capture the attention of the customer by any means, from the facade of the store to the location of each product inside the store.

Demands for gardening products vary by year, and by season, and often the heavy increase in customer traffic makes it impossible to complete each sale on a person-to-person basis. Your sales area should be designed so that on a busy day your customer will easily find what he or she wants. To be successful in the garden center business, you must put time and effort into designing efficient selling displays. Most retail nurseries and garden centers do approximately fifty percent of their total volume sales on weekends. Most sales occur during the busy spring months of March through June.

Layout of Store

The movement of your customer through your store determines the effectiveness of any display. Departments in a store should be assigned based on their profitability, contribution to customer needs, or shopping preferences. View floor plans at other retail store designs for ideas.

Display products to capture customer attention.



Retail giants such as Crate and Barrel, Ikea and Whole Food are masters of store lay out, customer traffic flow and displays and you should visit them frequently, as well as other garden centers.

Here are a few layout tips:

1. The entrance of the store provides the most valuable selling space and makes the first impression. When customers enter your store, an eye-catching display up front should grab their attention and communicate your garden center's image or brand.
2. Design your retail space to draw shoppers to the right side of the entryway. Shoppers usually prefer to move right and walk counter-clockwise around the store.
3. Create angles and breaks. While it's most efficient to lay out aisles parallel to the store's exterior walls, retailers can create more visual interest by placing them at an angle. Long, uninterrupted aisles don't get people's attention. Create stopping points in the middle of long aisles, such as signs or displays that create a visual break. But keep aisles wide enough for customers to navigate easily.
4. Staple items such as hard goods and basic stocks of green goods should be placed in the rear of the store and the sales yard. That allows your customers opportunities for impulse buys along the way.
5. The check out area is another high traffic spot and lends itself to last minute impulse buys. However, eliminate points of congestion and long lines at the registers. The checkout counter is the last impression of your garden center.

Visual Merchandising

Visual merchandising is the three-dimensional, still life, vignette that display goods or services to highlight their features and benefits. The purpose of the interior display is to develop desire for the merchandise, show what is available, and encourage both impulse and planned buying. You need to change displays regularly to give customers a fresh experience every time they shop. Always allow the customer to shop directly from a display.

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The purpose of visual merchandising is to:

1. Make it easier for a customer to locate the desired category and merchandise. This may include special occasions such as Easter, Mother's Day, advertised specials or a new line of merchandise.
2. Make it easier for a customer to self-select. During high volume times, you may not be able to personally assist every customer. An attractive display can do most of the work for you. It will also minimize expenses.
3. Suggests possible "add-on sales" by displaying related items together. Consider grouping themed items together for a powerful visual message. Themes connect customers to projects or activities, such as planting bulbs or grilling outdoors.
4. Educate the customer in an effective and creative way. A customer should easily see how to use a product in his/ her home.
5. Assists in turnover of distressed merchandise.
6. To capture attention, awaken the senses and provide the customers a wonderful buying experience. That will bring them back as a loyal customer and make more sales.



Display products to capture customer attention.

Your display allows your customers to visualize a need when the merchandise is grouped to suggest a specific use or need. Customers should be able to see what an item is, what it does, and how it will benefit the garden. Color schemes help customers decide what will go best with the home decor. Group plants with similar growth requirements, habit of growth, and plant height to allow your customers to see and compare. Plants requiring high light should be displayed separately from low light requiring plants to eliminate confusion. Plan your displays to sell themselves. Include items necessary for the care and culture of the plants being displayed, such as fertilizers, gloves and pruners.

Think of your plant displays as if it is the produce section of a grocery store. A few rotten tomatoes or wilted heads of lettuce would turn you off to the entire section. Wilted plants or plants need grooming, have dead flowers or otherwise look unhealthy will likewise turn off a customer. You are a retailer, not a plant hospital. Only display fresh, healthy plants.

In planning each display, be aware of the traffic pattern. Determine the "hot spots" in your store. Usually, high traffic areas are next to entrances, exits, and check-out stands. Use displays to sell your high margin items in these areas. Seasonal merchandise or slow moving items can be quickly sold by a display in high traffic areas, reducing unwanted inventory.

Sensory Input

Effective displays create an emotional response by stimulating the senses of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. 80 % of our impressions are made by sight. A garden center should have an inviting appearance that makes the customer feel comfortable and eager to buy. This includes landscaping around your buildings and in your parking lots.

- Stimulating the sense of sight can be achieved by using bright colors, color themes, texture, shape, and size, to name a few. Use accent lighting to feature products. Accent lighting creates visual interest and can bring colors to life. Lighting can also be used to direct the path of the customers and to make them see various displays along the way. Know the current "in" colors and use incorporate them in displays, using flowers, ceramic containers etc.
- Sound can also create a mood. The sound of falling water and wind chimes can create an outdoor atmosphere. Music can accent your display and help evoke the desired emotions. Avoid allowing the customers to experience irritating sounds during their shopping experience. Equipment such as lawn mowers and other mechanical equipment should be operated and demonstrated in an area where it will not disturb other customers. Loud walkie-talkies or intercom systems can disrupt conversations with your customers, so keep the volume down on such devices. Remember the music playing in the store should be for the enjoyment of the customers, not the staff.

