

Garden State(ments)

From garden markets to a fourth generation family-owned garden center, the 2011 Garden Centers of America (GCA) Summer Tour in New Jersey offered tour attendees plenty of variety and industry history. What follows are useful ideas from some standout stops on this year's tour.

By Pete Mihalek

The Power of Sound

With speakers situated in literally every nook and cranny of the property (all playing the same thing), Reynolds Garden Center creates a shopping ambiance I have yet to experience at any other garden center I've visited.

You may brush it off, but sometimes smooth jazz and soft rock don't cut it, especially when you're trying to appease a younger demographic. So if you're having a tough time agreeing on just what to play over your garden center speakers, give Reynolds a call and ask for their playlist.



What an Entrance

Simply put, the entrance — whether from the street or to a greenhouse — is important. The pair of 14-foot, yellow Adirondack chairs at Rutgers Landscape & Nursery make it impossible to miss this store from the road.

Barlow's Flower Farm shows off in a different way, with an impeccably manicured tree lawn that could rival something on display at the Chelsea Flower Show.

And when it comes to greenhouse entrances, Williams Nursery uses brightly colored sails to create an awning effect.





In the Bluehouse

The sun can get pretty brutal in the late spring and summer months. And the temperatures inside your greenhouses — forget about it. Strawberry Blossom Flower Shop uses blue screens to block those hot, harsh rays, which helps create a surprisingly cooler shopping experience.



Loud & Clear

Sickles Market has a new website. How do I know? Well, thanks to this brightly colored reminder, I'll probably never forget. An over-the-top banner like this is a great way to get your customers' attention, especially when you have something important to say.

Making A Point

Water gardening is a priority at Fairfield Garden Center. Because of that, the retailer decided to turn an old storage room into an evening-simulated showroom to illustrate to customers the dramatic effect lighting and water gardening can have on their property well after the sun goes down.



Signs of Success

The professionally made signs at Barlow's are second to none. This tomato sign shows customers three great things: confidence in the product, local pride and easy to follow steps to success. ... Oh, and how about that cross-merchandising below? Not too shabby.

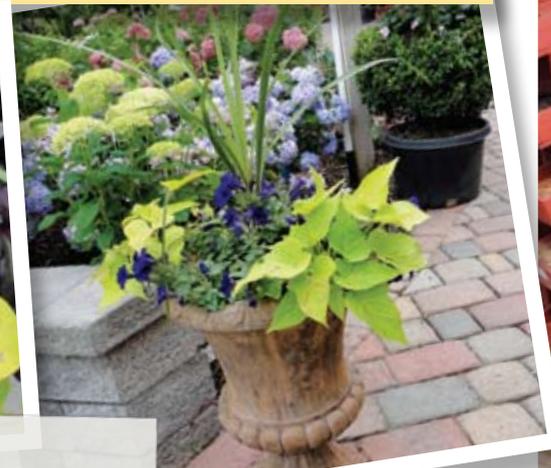


Merchandiser of the Year

Rutgers Nursery was our last stop on the last day of the tour, and after just being awarded *Lawn & Garden Retailer's* Merchandiser of the Year award, I came in with some high expectations — all of which were undoubtedly met.

This dog-friendly retailer also took it easy on us bipeds, too, by offering a bench to sit on at nearly every turn.

As for quick-change containers, the creatives at Rutgers show that beauty can be updated and rearranged in a moment's notice by dropping in — not planting — cell packs and 4-inch pots. And "The Lonely Hearts Club" at Rutgers is a fun and original take on the sometimes unruly clearance area.



FROM THE ROAD



For the Children

A definite headturner during our visit to Dearborn Market was its new children's garden. The garden's creative, fun (even for adults) and its signage did an excellent job encouraging an interactive experience.



Blank Canvas

Looking to spooft up a boring wall with limited resources? Old wagons and vendor P.O.P. went a long way at Strawberry Blossom Flower Shop.

Even leftover pallets found a useful home as a wall fixture at Rutgers Landscape & Nursery.



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