

5 MINIATURE GARDENING MUST-DOS

By Abby Kleckler

Miniature gardening is here to stay, and many retailers have been amping up their products in this category. Whether you haven't given miniatures much thought, or have fully embraced the offerings, Clark Hermanson, garden center manager at Pesche's Garden Center in Des Plaines, Illinois, has five tips for scaling up your scaled-down offerings.



1. CATCH THEIR EYE

Give customers something on a large scale to draw them in no matter how big or small the department. Pesche's started its miniature gardening department at its brick-and-mortar store five years ago with 8 square feet in the store, and now they have approximately 700 square feet.

The team at Pesche's has created a 10-by-10-foot fairy garden display (right) they change out every year and for the holidays.

"The kids bring the parents over to the section automatically because they want to know what we've done," Hermanson says.

Some of the displays have been more intricate with water features such as small lakes or rain coming from overhead, but it's the size that is really key.

Hermanson says to aim for at least 4 feet by 2 feet. This could be a small village on an old planting bench, a tabletop or inside a wheelbarrow. The key is to create an inspirational feature.





Photo Credit: Pestiche's

2. HAVE A GOOD PRODUCT MIX

With miniature gardening, Hermanson has found that customers care more about variety instead of depth of product.

"It is better to have six pieces of 30 different items than 12 pieces of 15 different items," he says. "You can always reorder." Some people prefer a more folksy look while other might like a more detailed, realistic look.

Hermanson recommends asking wholesalers for their top 10 or 20 sellers and then order a small amount of those items to begin. Instead of stocking all fairies or all accessories, you want to mix in little pots, bistro sets, etc. with those staple pieces.

"The more different types of items you can fit in your budget will make you a destination for fairy gardens and keeps people coming in," Hermanson says.

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GO BIG WITH MINIATURE GARDENING

Clark Hermanson has more than just these five great tips to help your miniature gardening department succeed.

On Nov. 12, Hermanson, garden center manager of Chicagoland's Pesche's Garden Center, presented a 40-minute webinar on how to get the most out of your miniature gardening department.

If you missed Lawn & Garden Retailer's recent webinar, "Go Big with Miniature Gardening," you can now view the archived presentation online at www.lgrmag.com.

The webinar is sponsored by Jeremie Miniatures.



3. KEEP LIKE ITEMS TOGETHER

With such a variety of items, it is important for your merchandising to make sense. For example, make sure to keep all the fairies together or all the animals together on your shelves.

Organize displays by theme. "You need to tell a story and show customers how to use the product by completing a variety of different scenes using houses, supplies and fairies," Hermanson says. "A lot of times customers may copy what you are doing if they like the look."

Jeremie Corp. set up a farm scene for their display at the IGC East show in Maryland (above), which could easily translate to your garden center.



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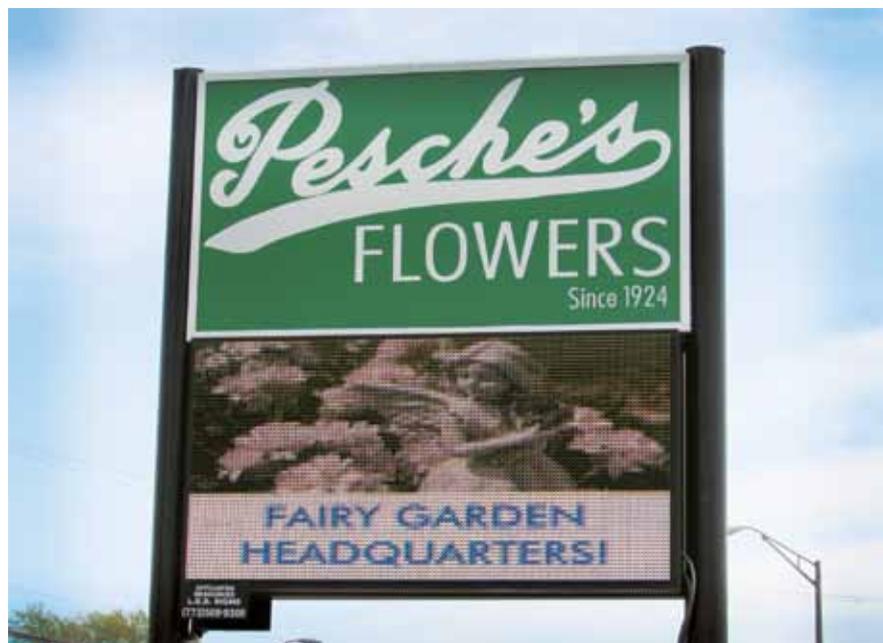
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4. SHOW OFF YOUR MINIATURES

People need to know you have a strong miniature gardening department. Whenever Pesche's gets a new product in, Hermanson posts the vendors' photos on its Facebook site to notify customers.

A large sign depicting Pesche's as a "Fairy Garden Headquarters!" stops drivers and beckons them to come inside, while signage at the entrance drives people back to the miniature garden display. Although some fairy gardening products are situated right near the registers, it is important to have signage, since not everything can be in that prime location of the store, according to Hermanson.

"We make sure that the people who are working the entrance to the garden center and greeting people in our busy times, steer people (especially those with children) to take a look at the miniature gardens," he says. "That keeps them coming back."



5. DON'T SHY AWAY FROM FAIRY PLANTS

Pesche's miniature gardening department has grown to \$82,000 annually for the brick-and-mortar store, \$22,000 of the total coming from fairy plants.

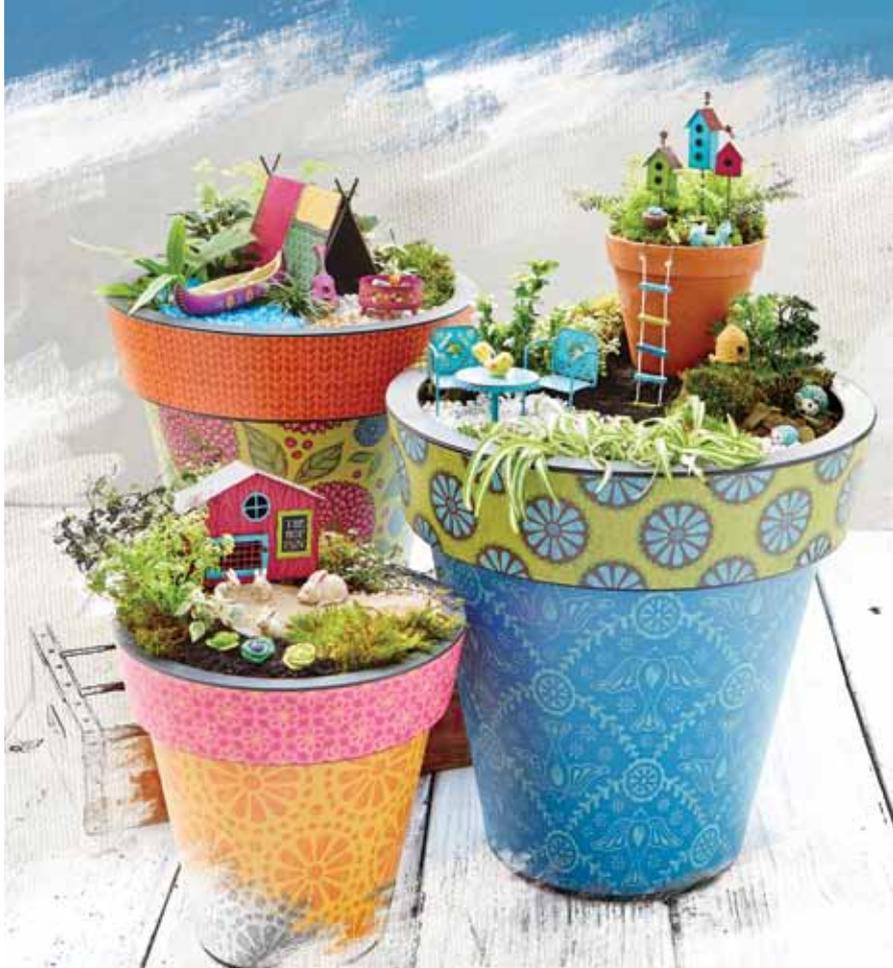
At \$2.99 for each plant, the demand is high. Pesche's puts them in baby blue or pink 3-inch pots. Customers have almost a collector's mentality where they need to have all the different plants, according to Hermanson.

Incorporating these plants in your large-scale miniature garden displays can also inspire, as Roger's Gardens in California shows (above).

"You can get fairy plants from anybody unbranded, but it's all about the tag. Brand these as fairy plants and people can see how to use them," Hermanson says. "People walk out with so many of these as opposed to an unbranded pot." **LGR**

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