

my favorite things

For many garden centers throughout the country, miniature and fairy gardening has become a big deal. Here are a few of my favorite tips to get customers excited about this magical category.

By Arlena Schott



photo credit: Sheryl Lozier, Summers Past Farms

As an independent garden center, you have an advantage over other retailers because of your genuine passion for gardening. Use this passion to inspire as well as educate. While you're putting the finishing touches on your spring-season preparations, have you also positioned yourself to get your customers

interested, excited and addicted to one of our industry's hottest categories — miniature gardening? If you need a little help in that area, don't fret. Just in time for spring, I have five of my favorite miniature gardening ideas to get you, your staff and your community of customers excited and coming back for more.

1 Create Buzz

Social media, local newspaper, local news channels, weekend radio shows — your pick. Each outlet is always in need of trusted, respected and seasonal content.

Consider seeking out and building a relationship with your area's garden bloggers. They are hungry for timely content to share with their followers, and who better to get the correct information to them than from the garden centers that live it every day. Be sure to invite them to your workshops ... with a VIP pass!

2 Planter Show & Tell

Give guests the option of bringing their own unusual containers or have containers you'd like to turn in close proximity to your workshop area or miniature gardening section. My favorite part is seeing what unusual and meaningful containers guests will bring.

Containers are a very fun part of miniature gardening. The more the unusual the better. Do not rule out the broken planters, birdbaths or fountains you have hidden in the back of the garden center — they might just be someone's treasure!

3 Post-Workshop Workout

Provide chairs and a creating area with tables and pre-moistened soil for after the seminar where your newly-inspired guests can create their own gardens.

Miniature gardens can be as small as a tea cup or as large as a full landscape. Impress upon your customers that there aren't any rules.

4 Proximity is Key

Make sure your display of miniature accessories with finished examples are priced and close to the workshop area and its entrance/exit.

For example, I was just at Natural Springs Garden Center in Natchitoches, La., and they used chalkboard paint to paint the sides of their display tables so they could add signage about the workshop in colorful and whimsical words. I also saw a wonderful miniature garden display using a potting bench and terra-cotta planters filled with sand to display garden picks and accessories.

Independent garden centers already have the plants to offer so make a point of displaying them with the miniature garden accessories as your favorites. I feel that there isn't a plant that is safe from me using in a miniature or fairy gardens.

5 Save the Stones

Always have weed-barrier fabric on hand to cut into paths and patios for use under the stones your customers might incorporate into their designs. This prevents the stones from being swallowed by the soil and keeps customers from getting frustrated. **LGR**



Arlena Schott is the host of the TV series Garden Wise Living TV (www.gardenwisetv.com). She is the co-host of Back Yard Poultry with the Chicken Whisperer Blog Talk Radio. Arlena is also a miniature garden expert as well as Guru Spokesperson for Jeremie Corp. Miniatures and is currently touring Independent Garden Centers throughout the country on the Magical Miniature Garden Workshop Tour with Jeremie Corp.