

# SKY'S THE LIMIT

Inspired by high-end retail, customer demand and its very own surroundings, Sky Nursery's interactive "Sail Away with Succulents" display garnered the retailer top honors as *Lawn & Garden Retailer's* 2013 Merchandiser of the Year.

By Pete Mihalek



**B**y providing its clientele an inspiring yet equally shoppable succulents display, the design team at Sky Nursery, Shoreline, Wash., created one of its longest standing seasonal displays. And for good reason — it was highly successful, moving more than 100,000 3½-inch succulents between April and July.

In addition to moving plenty of product, this "Sail Away with Succulents" display pushed all the right merchandising buttons with our esteemed judges panel to earn the title of *Lawn & Garden Retailer's* 2013 Merchandiser of the Year.

Today, we catch up with Megan Eberhart, visual merchandiser at Sky Nursery, to learn a little more about the thought process that went into creating this winning display.

**LGR:** Noted in Sky Nursery's Merchandiser of the Year application, the driving force behind your "Sail Away with Succulents" display was to capitalize on the current trend of low-maintenance gardening naturally paired with the tranquility of your unique local seashore.

Can you explain some of the groundwork that led up to the creation of this theme?

**Megan Eberhart:** The whole idea got its spark last year when our container designer put together some succulent container gardens using cast concrete clamshell planters we carry.

They sold immediately. So we thought we should explore the idea further, especially when we saw how prevalent succulents were becoming.

An important part of our job is to track trends and then find ways to translate these trends into workable and meaningful strategies for our business and particular client base. We saw that succulents were permeating into other industries like the wedding industry, for example, and lifestyle retailers like West Elm and Anthropologie were on it.

**LGR:** What is it about succulents that made this theme a success?

**Eberhart:** The unique qualities of succulents allow for the showcasing of individualistic style. The possibilities for creativity are seemingly endless with myriad varieties to choose from.

And it doesn't hurt that Generation Y seems very interested.



Succulents are accessible — you don't have to be a "gardener" to feel successful.

The theme "Sail Away with Succulents" evokes summer fun on the water, which is such a part of the Puget Sound lifestyle. To our customers it's a relatable subject, to which the plants lend themselves. Their oceanic, sculptural qualities are reminiscent of a coral reef, sea urchins, algae and kelp.

**LGR:** You've categorized this display as a utilitarian one. Can you explain what utilitarian means to Sky Nursery?

**Eberhart:** We always make sure tables are easily shopped by all types of customer. Products are set at appropriate heights, hanging things at eye level. Everything must be reachable and can also be easily restocked by staff.

We want customers to have a large quantity to choose from so they can shop from the display without feeling like they are damaging it or taking away from its beauty.

**LGR:** Where do you get inspired?

**Eberhart:** Inspiration comes from all over — it's important to me to keep creative, be open to new and interesting influences, and be observant of what other businesses are doing to stay relevant.

I look at trends in fashion, décor, color and our industry. I spend time exploring Pinterest,

reading design magazines (*Elle Decor*), blogs ([www.redoitdesign.com](http://www.redoitdesign.com)), and checking out what's going on at other nurseries and retailers.

I like to see and read up on what high-end retailers are doing for their marketing campaigns. It's these businesses that set the tone for popular culture, determining customer expectations in all shopping experiences.

**LGR:** Now that we're moving into fall, what's taken the place of "Sail Away with Succulents"?

**Eberhart:** We're currently launching our Garden Party campaign as we move into late summer and fall.

We are looking to inspire our customers to now enjoy the gardens they've built this spring. We're doing that by offering more outdoor décor items such as statuary, fountains, furniture and art accessories for the garden, in addition to our late summer plants that can help refresh a tired container. We're also showcasing a selection of customer containers that are easy to pop into the landscape and on the tabletop or patio, for a quick pick me up.

Plans for the fall and holidays are underway with edibles being prominently featured before moving into the festivities of November and December.

## THE VERDICT'S IN...

### JUDGES



**Ian Baldwin:** "Riding the succulent wave and creating 100,000 new unit sales at \$3-6 each in a recession, fighting for every dollar is what merchandising should be about. Merchandising has to be more than pretty, it has to create new, unplanned customer spending (and Sky Nursery does that)."



**Sid Raisch:** "Sky's entry is focused on selling a complete solution of design and style with low-maintenance plants. They provide inspiration, finished product choices as well as all the components. The display is signed, cross-merchandised and is completely shop-able. Floor graphics of a coral give the area a distinct feel."



**Carmen Johnston:** "This retail display does a fabulous job of layering textures, colors and unique objects creating an engaging customer experience. They have taken advantage of ALL retail space by painting fun colorful corals on the floor to hanging objects from the ceiling pleasing all possible places for the customers eye to land. It is important for garden centers to remember we are in the fashion business every season and just as fashion reinvents itself every spring we need to do the same with plants."



**Bill Calkins:** "The display is clever and attractive, while successfully capturing the excitement of a major retail trend — succulents are HOT! The vintage look complements the product line and offers pre-made combos and dish gardens, as well as individual plants to make your own. It allows every customer to get in on the trend."

## AND THE WINNER RECEIVES...

In addition to the prestigious title of Merchandiser of the Year, the winner receives two profit-generating prizes: a \$500 Wholesale Gift credit and a 15 percent discount for Braun Horticulture's 2013 catalog offering (1 time); and a fully-stocked and colorful Dramm 60501 Assorted Gardening Display worth SRP \$2,864.76.

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