

on four wheels

Mobile businesses are here to stay, and they're not only in urban environments. There were more than 4,000 food trucks throughout the U.S. in 2015 that brought in \$1.2 billion, according to Mobile-Cuisine.

I must admit that I helped that bottom line with the doughnut trucks that drive around the city of Chicago and the lunch options that would roll into the parking lot of our suburban office.

There's something to be said for the fleeting opportunity to grab a delicious treat before it heads off to its next destination.

What can these food trucks do for you, you ask?

I seem to be hearing more and more about garden centers incorporating these trucks into their businesses in some way or another.

Homestead Gardens in Davidsonville, Maryland, for example, closed its café inside the store, and it instead has trucks with everything from sandwiches to popsicles set up shop on busy days. These trucks also make appearances during special events, which I've heard many other garden centers doing as well.

Unless you have someone on your team who has the same passion for food as you do for plants, food trucks offer a great option. Your customers get a place to eat, and food truck followers might discover the garden center for the first time.

Lawn & Garden Retailer's 2016 Merchandiser of the Year — you'll have to flip to page 10 to see who I'm referring to — partnered with Art & Soul Café to serve food at the garden center on Fridays and Saturdays.

"We always wanted a café, but we don't have the skill set or the time," says owner Lisa LeFevre (another hint about the winner). "For us, another small business partnership made sense."

Don't just think about trucks as an opportunity to provide a service; they can also create a destination.

I heard about The Peach Truck (www.thepeachtruck.com) from Bob Wasson with Wasson Nursery in Indiana. The truck travels with fresh Georgia peaches throughout the summer, making stops at local businesses — many garden centers — and drawing huge crowds.

Wasson Nursery even had them twice this summer since it was such a hit.

potential beyond food

In this month's Outside the Vines column, on page 74, Ana Olvera profiles two mobile businesses that have absolutely nothing to do with food.

One sells yarn and the other, you guessed it, sells flowers.

We've heard of garden centers doing pop-up shops in the busiest spring months at a location they know will receive a lot of foot traffic. Maybe your business has even tried this.

Could a garden center truck have potential? I concede that's not a simple yes or no question, but it could allow you to extend your reach to a new group of people, it could help you move inventory quickly, and it could increase a customer's urgency to buy before it pulls away.




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