



# THE GARDEN RETAIL | *Dream* OF

These ideas won't break the bank of your marketing budget but will drive a lot of interest in and around your store.

By Lauren Snyder

It wasn't until I began helping my flute teacher in her garden as a way to pay for my lessons that I discovered the thrill of a freshly weeded vegetable patch or the excitement of transplanting roses. She was the first one that I remember taking me to a garden center. And what a magical place that was.

Now 10 years into trying to scratch that gardening itch and besides wanting every plant I see, I find myself desperate for a garden center that finally combines all of the best ideas I've seen and experienced across our nation's garden retailers.

These ideas have common themes of exploiting the quirky personalities of the business, delighting customers and making customers' lives easier.

So with the hot-and-heavy retail season nearly upon us, go big and go bold, retailers. Your customers will thank you, new customers will find you and you'll probably have a heckuva lot more fun.

### Fun Road Signs

Life can get awfully monotonous, and a daily commute to work is sometimes the most boring of them all — same playlist of songs on the radio, same traffic, same headache.

Do your passersby a favor and entertain them on their drive to work. Not only will you catch their attention, but eventually, they'll purposely start paying attention to you because you'll be something different.

You'll reinforce your name, your brand and earn yourself some brain-space square footage for the next time they have that gardening itch or just want to see what you're all about.

Don't worry about making signs all plant-related. The key here? Change it up — like weekly or bi-weekly. This trains commuters to start paying attention to what's new. (And seriously — steal these: some are original and others are inspired by Pinterest and Facebook.)

- Hello world. New plants arrive weekly.
- Unhappy? Come in, we'll fix that.
- Everyone smiles here. Promise.
- Stop in and say "aloe!"
- Free plant burials. Go home with a live one.
- Unique gifts. Lotion is boring.
- Get your plants here — we're rooting for you!
- Caution: Extremely happy people here.
- Fish die too. Plants are better.
- Fall in love with our mums! (Your mum's great, too.)
- Plant lady is the new cat lady.
- Happy for spring from our fingers "tomatoes."
- Plant flowers. Pull weeds. Find happiness. Repeat.
- Flowers can't solve all problems. But it's a start.
- If you don't shop here, you're not cool. Dill with it.
- Lettuce turnip the beet in your landscape.
- Stop. Hammer thyme.
- Winter's crappy. Let's make you happy. Tour our space!
- Life's a garden. Dig it.
- Getting dirty never felt so good. Soil 30% off.

### Inspiring Social Media

Following the trend of engaging current and potential customers before they walk in the door, social media is a must. The best strategy is to be

consistent, be current, be yourself and focus on the inspirational and entertaining aspects — not just the informational.

Videos are a great option here, and luckily with that smartphone you're already carrying in your pocket, videos can be quick and easy.

Soleil Garden Center in Union City, Tennessee, has an absolutely fantastic ongoing video series. What makes these videos awesome is they are creative, showcase the individual personality of the business, and subtly market different aspects of the business and business principles.

For example, some might showcase what's on sale or what's available over the weekend, while



Get customers to stop in with clever signs like this one at Wojo's Greenhouse.



FRESH PERSPECTIVES

others focus on informing customers of how to take care of plants or what to do when you bring a diseased plant in for diagnosing. (They feature these videos front and center on their homepage — [www.soleilgardencenter.com](http://www.soleilgardencenter.com).)

Another social media favorite is the Mulhall's (Omaha, Nebraska) Instagram ([www.instagram.com/mulhalls](http://www.instagram.com/mulhalls)). These Instagram posts can auto-populate your Facebook profile, as well, so you're killing two birds with one stone.

Instagram should be every garden center's favorite social media platform. We're fortunate to work with a product that doesn't take much sprucing; it just takes framing, and Mulhall's has done an incredible job of casting their products in different roles that I want in my life right now.

From houseplant vignettes to shots of the greenhouse, seeing all that green life is a refreshing showstopper in my Instagram feed. These kinds of posts are sharable, pinnable and they make me want the product. Where there's a want, there's a way.

(P.S. If you haven't experimented with it already, also try "boosting" some of your Facebook posts. You can collect some fantastic demographics, and the return on your investment sometimes can have 50 percent or more exposure than an unboosted post and is far less expensive than advertising in the newspaper, which doesn't provide you with any data.)



Mulhall's in Omaha, Nebraska, gets creative with its Instagram posts.

Make It a Package Deal


This one falls into the category of making life easy for your customers.

Here's an example: My mother-in-law needed some new work outfits and spent several days

shopping at various big box retailers looking for these outfits. I think she ended up with a single pair of pants. Her complaint was that she just can't "see" the outfit unless someone puts it together for her.

How many garden center customers feel the same way?

You know who they are — they're the ones so desperate for help and a vision that they latch onto an unsuspecting staff member for hours to have that staff plan their garden (been there, done that). Those customers come in wanting an outfit



40  
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This series — Fresh Perspectives — provides garden center tips from Generations X, Y and Z. Lauren Snyder is a member of GPN's 40 Under 40 Class of 2016. For more information, visit [www.gpnmag.com/40-under-40](http://www.gpnmag.com/40-under-40).



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for their landscape, and they're presented with the ingredients but not the recipe.

Why do you think clothing stores dress up mannequins? They're helping customers "see" the end result. I can't tell you the number of times I've purchased clothing because I saw it on the mannequin first.

So, create the displays and the vignettes and the "recipes." The ideas are endless! "Recipe for a small space." "Recipe for a shade garden." "Recipe for an all-natural privacy screen." "Recipe for window boxes." "Recipe for a children's butterfly garden."

Stage the plants, show them what this looks like and then have all the materials they need for this package deal right there. Once your customer can confidently load up their carts, they're going to feel pretty good about themselves. You just made them feel confident about gardening and like they have the tools for success.

Plus, having everything in a packaged suite means they'll probably pick up things they weren't expecting to (i.e., spending a little more money...)

Ideas are Like Seeds. You've Got to Plant Them First.

The beauty of these ideas is they aren't going to drain your marketing budget. It's all about knowing where your customers/potential customers are (on their way to work and on social media) and meeting them there to bring them to you.

Chances are, you're not first on their list of things to think about or places to go. But keep showing up; keep reminding them that you exist.

When they do finally stop by, be ready. Be excited. And blow them away. Don't be afraid to be yourself; don't be afraid to let your employees shine and bring their ideas to the table; and don't be afraid to take reasonable risks just to see if something works.

After all, retailers, you all are the frontlines of the entire horticulture industry. Our success begins and ends with you. We're rooting for you. So grow on, you crazy kids. Have fun out there. We work in a fantastic industry with a phenomenal product. Life's too short not to see how beautiful that is. **LGR**

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Signage at Homestead Gardens directs people to an area specifically for pollinator plants.



Mulhall's shares inspirational photos on its Instagram, this one garnering more than 200 likes.



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