

YEAR-ROUND WORKSHOPS

Spark your creativity with some easy ideas to get customers interacting with your products and with your staff.

By Louise Reiling

My favorite part of winter is looking through all of the seed catalogs that are arriving daily and thinking about my spring garden. Well, you can bet that many of your customers are doing the same thing. That's why the winter months are a great opportunity to reach your existing customers as well as new ones — and get them ready for the upcoming spring season.

Take Advantage of Winter

Here are just a few suggestions that we offer and that you might want to consider to bring in customers during the winter.

Give them a reason to walk through your greenhouse in February and March, even when there is a foot of snow on the ground.

Offer gardening workshops during the winter months and they will come.

Your customers are hungry for the smell of soil, the sight of green plants and seeds germinating. We take this for granted because we see it every day.

Offer seed starting and plant propagation workshops. "What to Plant When" is always a popular class.

This is also a great time of year for succulent workshops, make a terrarium, decorative stone and hypertufa workshops.



Want to learn more about what events work?

Flip to page 118. Each month, in the new Event Central column, Lawn & Garden Retailer will take an in-depth look at one event that has become a staple of success and increased sales at an independent garden center.

Invite your customers to a Behind the Scenes walkthrough of your greenhouse — they will be amazed at what goes into growing plants, and they will love to see the parts of your greenhouse not open to the public.

Spring will be here before you know it. Plan now to offer some creative workshops at your garden center.

Some of our favorites include an Easter Basket workshop with a wire basket lined with moss and filled with spring bulbs and primrose and a little cement bird. They are beautiful, and your customers will love them.

For our Mother's Day workshop last year, instead of the vase arrangement we normally do, we offered a tea cup arrangement. It was very successful.

Give your customers creative ways to garden. Pallet gardening is a no-fail way to garden, no weeding and no digging. This class always fills up fast, and we sell kits so they can make one easily at home.

Show them how to do straw bale gardening. Offer a class on container vegetable gardening with a list of the best new varieties to use. Also popular is a Container Water Garden workshop. They are unique, a conversation piece and perfect for the person who travels often in the summer.

Offering workshops at your garden center throughout the year has many advantages. It is a great way to bring in money during otherwise slow weeks. It positions you and your employees as experts. You get to share your passion for plants!

Most workshops give you a chance to connect one-on-one with your customers. Whether it be making a hypertufa or arranging a bouquet of flowers, there is time to chat and really get to know some of your customers and what they like and don't like.



By being a good listener, this is a great time to hear what other workshops they would enjoy participating in and what the best days and times are for them for future workshops.

People need creativity in their life. They feel good after doing an artistic project, especially when they are surrounded by plants.



You can catch Louise at the Midwest Green Industry Experience (MGIX), Jan. 15-17, 2018, at the Greater Columbus Convention Center, in Columbus, Ohio. She'll be speaking on "Fun and Educational Workshops to Offer at Your Garden Center." For more information, please visit www.mgix.com.



We used to hold workshops in an empty hoop house, but now we have an area we use in the middle of plants and it makes them feel great.

Make-and-take workshops continue to be popular. Garden clubs and other groups are always looking for fun workshops to offer their members. Being willing to go to their location will increase your reach into other communities. Many garden clubs have older members who won't drive far distances and appreciate you coming to them.

Winter is a great time to do PowerPoint presentations for garden clubs. "New Plants and Garden Trends" is always a favorite topic. These types of presentations can help your customers "plant the seed" for their springtime gardens. **LGR**



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