

It's a Small World After All

By John Johnston

There is BIG potential with small products. Are you taking advantage of these categories?

While retailers look for new ways to intrigue customers with unique products and events, plants still drive the majority of garden-center sales. And have you noticed? Small is fashionable! Or, at least, it can be.

For more than a decade, we waited patiently for the miniature (fairy) gardening movement to gain traction. In many stores, it just didn't happen. Some garden centers eventually trimmed inventory due to the lack of interest. However, what did happen may surprise you.

Small Plants, Bigger Sales

One sales surprise for many retailers is in the houseplant department. According to one industry report, sales of cacti and succulents increased for 65% of respondents, while 31% indicated no change in sales. It was the highest positive percentage change in the report without question.

The next highest category gain was in pottery and containers. No surprise, since the indoor container business continues to thrive with demand for smaller, low-maintenance plants, fresh herbs for cooking and tabletop planters.

Houseplant Revival

While small plant material is hardly new, succulents have become a success story for many retailers and,

dare I say it, fun! These plants capture the imagination of both experienced and novice consumers with unique textures and colors for year-round enjoyment. Succulents are so easy to care for and rugged, they have success written all over them.

Supermarkets stole much of the market share of foliage plants about 20 years ago. Our industry adjusted by cutting back on selections and inventory. In contrast,

cacti and succulents have shown staying power, and it's easy to see why.

By combining the surge of interest in cacti and succulents with the newest shapes, sizes and textures of container materials, this trending category has something for everyone!

Displays That Sell

One recent development in succulents is from growers who can ship an upright display complete with signage that's truly retail-ready. These preloaded displays are space-saving and can put virtually anyone in the succulent business!

Having seen some terrific retail assortments around the country, I'm especially impressed by vertical displays with integrated samplings of combo planters. They're not just bowls and low-profile vessels; many have included vintage-looking products using distressed woods and metals, including country artifacts like milk bottles and crates.

The Best Recipes Have Great Ingredients

The most successful succulent retailers have embraced the category, investing in both presentation and product mix to drive sales. A diverse lineup of plants and fun accessories work together to get consumers excited about their pint-sized purchase. Helpful staff in the aisles can guide customers toward



add-on products for planting and maintenance. Pre-potted examples in an array of interesting containers inspire folks to think beyond the plant itself.

Get creative with your container assortment! Go beyond simple bowls and consider a broad mix of materials. Ceramics, plastic, cement, fiberglass, resin, wood and glass are just some of the options out there.

More container choices enable consumers to use succulents in more places in and around the home. Planted cacti and succulents are seen on many HGTV shows in bathrooms, kitchens, dining rooms and bedrooms, as well as patios and entrance areas.

Retailer Dilemma

When choosing add-on products, do so with a critical eye. It's not just about colorful packaging. Can you read the front label easily from a distance? Try the "gunslinger merchandise" technique: Walk 10 feet from the display, turn and fire (read). If you can read the label and know what's in the bag or what the product is for, keep it. If not, find another vendor option.

Consumers struggle with reading fine print. Minimizing confusion at the shelf is critical to your store sales. No matter what your selling price is, today's retail is driven by speed and convenience. If there isn't a label or sticker showing that selling price, you have bigger worries! More than half of all retail sales failures occur due to the lack of a visible price.



Downsizing Staff, Upsizing Display Acumen

Finding and keeping great employees is tough these days, especially in our industry. As a result, in-store service levels continue to slip. Merchandising is one way to offset the shortage of quality staff.

Keep display tables fresh, clean, bright, cheery and well stocked. If it's new, shout it out with signage! Position complementary products at or near relevant plants whenever possible.

A quick tip on merchandising add-on products: Organize any large department or category first by need, and then by brand or manufacturer. It helps the consumer scan the shelf quickly and decisively.

Dark display materials like espresso-stained wooden fixtures are on-trend but may need to be balanced out with higher light levels. Add spot lighting as needed to amplify the qualities of glass, wood and ceramics.

Color is our industry's biggest asset. Grouping plants and containers by color lifts sales in even obscure categories like small houseplants and indoor pottery.

It's a small world when it comes to retail space in your store, but this category has super-sized potential with every age group if you're willing to invest in it. 🌿

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