

# Downtown Destimation

By Teresa McPherson

The 2019 Merchandiser of the Year, Gardens of Babylon in Nashville, Tennessee, draws customers for its ever-evolving merchandise and atmosphere.



**F**un and funky might not be the first words that come to mind when thinking about a garden center — but they're exactly what Gardens of Babylon in Nashville, Tennessee, is aiming for.

"The one comment we always seem to get is that Gardens of Babylon has a fun, funky atmosphere," says Mark Kerske, founder and co-owner. "I think that is the best compliment we can ever get, because that's the direction that we want our store to be. We want it to be always evolving, always changing, always up to date."

Throughout the 18,000-square-foot property, displays incorporate a combination of flowering shrubs, evergreens, tropicals, and statuary. All of the staff take part in the displays — from planning and planting to maintenance. "We have such a talented staff," he says. "They have such creative minds that they come up with some really cool displays."

A tower of giraffes stands at the on-site display gardens behind the greenhouse. This area features new plant introductions and herb and vegetable gardens. Tropical plants continue to be one of the best sellers in the store, Kerske says. The garden center offers free planting of tropicals, which can be done while customers watch or they can continue to browse.

Gardens of Babylon also recently expanded its pottery selection to offer just about any color and size customers might be looking for. Containers range from tabletop pieces to giant 5-foot planters that can be used as focal points in a garden.

A new addition to the gift area is a selection of gemstones, which range from small \$5 stones that can be tucked into a pocket to \$5,000 display pieces for the home.

As the 2019 Merchandiser of the Year, Gardens of Babylon will receive a Dramm 60123 Display, which retails for more than \$2,400, and a \$500 Wholesale Gift Credit from Braun Garden Products and a 15 percent discount for Braun's 2019 Catalog offering (one time).



## FROM THE JUDGES

Here's what some of the Merchandiser of the Year judges had to say about Gardens of Babylon.

**Jessica Reinhardt, Dramm Corp.:** The garden center did a great job of creating a unique and fun experience for customers. The display garden is a place for customers to discover new plant introductions and herb and vegetable gardens.

I especially liked the idea of customers getting their tropicals planted for free! Research has shown that the biggest hurdle for customers is fear, fear of failing or killing

the plant they just bought. Letting the educated staff plant the tree easily reassures the customers they are off to a great start with their new plant/tree purchase!

**Bridget Behe, Michigan State University:** Loved the statues lying in the garden display. Very fun!

**Stan Pohmer, Pohmer Consulting:** Merchandising at this garden center goes far beyond simple displays; they use merchandising as a strategic philosophy! They engage the entire team to plan, plant and maintain the gardens. They use the displays as a source of inspiration for both their staff and customers, integrating products from all categories in vignette-type displays showing real end-use application.

They intentionally designed the garden center to include seating and lounge areas for customers to simply come in to relax or eat bag lunches, providing opportunities for folks to just sit back and enjoy the creations they've designed.

Their tropical plant potting area provides an opportunity for customers to learn how to properly plant and care for the plants they purchase, which will end up in a higher success and enjoyment level for the customer.

For the team at Gardens of Babylon, merchandising isn't just a display or event; rather, it's an integral element of a strategic approach to interacting with their customers throughout the year or season, and in my judgment, they deserve special recognition for their accomplishments!



### FAST FACTS

Year opened: 2003

Number of employees:  
25 during busy season

Mission Statement: Our mission is to improve the lives of everyone we serve by connecting them to the natural world.



### In the Heart of the City

As the anchor tenant of the Nashville Farmers Market, Gardens of Babylon is located in the heart of downtown Nashville, drawing both tourists and locals into the store.

"We're blessed with a lot of tourists that come into the store because they visit Nashville and we're right in downtown Nashville, just a few blocks off the main drag," Kerske says.

"A lot of people tell us that they come back year after year to visit the store."

The attached farmers market and its food court also help to attract visitors.

"We have a lot of office workers that come to the farmers market to get their lunch at the food court and come and sit on one of the many benches under the shade cloth," he says. "We love to see that. We love to see people sit down and have lunch and have a conversation and among those seating areas we have some really artistic displays." 🌿