

ADDING HEMP AS A PRODUCT CATEGORY

By Ana Olvera

Adding hemp cultivation supplies and hemp-derived products can be just as rewarding for your customers as it can be for your business.



The store emphasizes educating customers on familiar products that can now be applied to hemp.

North Carolina-based Fifth Season Gardening Co. has found success in marketing its current product selections to the expanding hemp market. The family-owned business specializes in hydroponics, homebrew and organic gardening equipment at its five locations. When hemp production became legal in North Carolina, Fifth Season Gardening saw an opportunity for an added revenue stream and a chance to introduce customers to a crop the company believed in.

Expanding into hemp seemed like a natural progression for the store and its customers as a retailer already targeting indoor growing, says Mike Weeks, a managing partner at Fifth Season Gardening. Weeks, who manages the Asheville location, has previous cultivation experience from working in the medical cannabis industry.

“Our backbone, what we first started off with, was selling indoor gardening equipment — grow lights, carbon filters, hydroponics supplies,” he says. “Once we began to see that [hemp] market development in other states like California and Michigan, it sort of made sense for us. We knew that that was going to be our people, so to say.”

Hemp cultivation supplies available at Fifth Season Gardening range from cloning equipment to soils and amendments to lighting and more. Hemp flower is also grown, processed and sold in-store by the gram in glass jars or in pre-rolled cones. The hemp is grown using organic inputs and is tested by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture. Fifth Season Gardening also carries a line of



Hemp is grown in-store using Gorilla grow tents.
Photos: Fifth Season Gardening Co.

full-spectrum hemp oils from Colorado-based Saving Grace.

Some of the products Fifth Season Gardening was already carrying — like from Griffin Greenhouse and BFG — could also be applied to hemp.

“We didn’t really have to add anything,” Weeks says. “We already sort of provided those same kinds of growing materials.”

Rather than having to order a store section worth of new inventory, Weeks and the store team have spent time educating customers on the additional hemp use familiar products have. For example, letting customers know the pots and soil amendments they have been using for their indoor-grown vegetables can also be used for hemp production.

Weeks’ team has a strong focus on sharing their knowledge and resources with customers. Consultation services are available for licensed commercial hemp growers, including permitting assistance, lighting diagram

design and integrated pest management. Growing hemp inside 5x5 Gorilla grow tents visible to customers provides numerous education opportunities throughout the cultivation process.

“Most of our consulting happens on the sales floor all day — either educating folks on benefits of CBD and hemp products, or through the education on how to grow hemp,” Weeks says. “We get a lot of farmers that are beginners. We go over nutritional needs, recommendations on pest control, and everything that has to do with growing hemp successfully.”

The Fifth Season Gardening website provides additional information resources, such as website links for products, cultivation tips and blog posts.

Considerations for CBD products

When it comes to hemp-derived products, whether they be oils, balms or even flower, Weeks warns of making certain claims when introducing products to customers.

“We’re not trying to play pharmacist over here. You really have to be careful with that — making these claims,” he says. “Folks come in and they might explain what kind of ailments they have and all you can really do is say ‘You may want to try this.’ You can’t make any claims like ‘This is going to heal you.’ You can say, ‘I’ve been informed [by other customers] that this product may help with inflammation.’”

Weeks encourages retailers to establish a genuine connection with the distributors they source their hemp-derived products from. From production practices to their testing information, the more you know about the



Fifth Season Gardening carries supplies for indoor growing, organic gardening and home brewing.

product, the more comfortable you will feel offering to your customers, he says.

“Find out about their practices, how they’re extracting and make sure that they have proper testing,” Weeks says. “If you’re going to purchase flower, demand that there’s some post harvest numbers that you can see so that you’re protecting your business as well as your customers.”

The addition of hemp as a product category at Fifth Season Gardening has been just as rewarding on a personal level as it has been as a revenue stream. Customers welcomed the addition of hemp and trusted staff on product recommendations, Weeks says.

“They know that we’re going to apply the same care to those [hemp] plants as we do with anything else,” he says. “We sort of have a reputation of knowing what we’re talking about. People have come to our store for years to gain knowledge on growing specific plants so we’d treat [hemp] no differently.”

Helping customers find a hemp-derived product that may provide relief has been the most enjoyable part for Weeks.

“When they come back for a refill or another product and they’re like, ‘Hey, that worked. I’m sleeping again,’ or ‘The pain in my ankle has been reduced’ — that’s something to feel good about.”

Fifth Season Gardening Co. can be found online at www.fifthseasongardening.com or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/FifthSeasonGardeningAshevilleMarket. 🌱

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