

# The Gardener's Design Review



Gardening apparel is a difficult category to merchandise. Here are some ways you can make a sometimes boring store section stand out.

By Joseph Weishar

**W**hat can you do with aprons, work pants, tool belts, wide-brim hats, boots, kerchiefs, old work shirts, carry bags, machines and all the “stuff” that is found around a home garden area? Certainly it is not for a fashion show, at least not within our current fashionable ratings. It would be hard to put garden shop work outfits next to Ralph Lauren designs, but there is obviously a need to look at each category and try to determine what is the best and, if I’m permitted to say, “fashionable” way to show items. Need and want will always be the equation in the fashion picture.

Camping used to be a fairly upscale sport represented by the original Abercrombie and Fitch, whose store always had a racing skull hanging from the ceiling of the first floor. When did tennis move away from whites and when did swimming move away from the tank suit? It’s all a cycle, and somewhere the lawn and garden industry fits into the picture of today’s retailer and customer. Gardening is not just about making things pretty, it is about the way you live. The way you feel about yourself will sponsor the need to adjust the image of sweat-stained, muddy pants to something both useful and even fashionable when wet or dirt stained.

## Fashionable Garden Apparel

I’m not suggesting having a garden party in gardening clothes (although that could be fun). What I believe is essential to all shop owners is to “fash-

ionably” present some mundane practical bits of clothing and accessories as items with integrity and image. In virtually all garden centers, these items are sold indoors. That simply means you have at your control the best customer emotion stimulants. Lighting and artistic, pragmatic item presentation are the elements that must be employed and are readily available to anyone who cares.

I leave out fixturing as an element to simply stress that quantity of items shown should be equal to the customer’s image of style and price position. Customers entering a space have a very good idea of what they will find and at what level of taste and competence they will find the items they either need or would like to have.

## Presentation Is Key

You must exhibit a consistency of product, accessories and ambience. In the same way, you must think of the most propitious way to show and, hopefully, sell those items. There are many examples of presentation that you can employ at no extra cost to make a signature lasting impression on your clientele.

I have found many wonderful examples of superior presentation both at trade shows and in garden centers. It is not simply making a statement that is exciting to view; it must also be practical to select and buy. The balance between self-selection and sales assistance is the key to the way you handle presentations. There will hardly ever be a case of total customer selection. But the balance among merchandise on hand, staff and expected turns should form the merchandise levels of each item. Your customers weigh the entire picture to determine how the item being presented fits the image they have of the shop’s range.

In all instances, the item presentation falls on the artistic integrity of the sales associate. It is up to the management to provide the atmosphere and encouragement for making presentation of each item “fashionable.” If we look at a few new shops, such as Alessi, the maker of cutlery and kitchen items, or even at Sici’s, an Italian floor tile firm, you can easily see how visual image fits within the entire philosophical approach to service and product. People want to be in them and will make them a prime consideration for their shopping. Visual imagery translates to trust in professionalism.

## How To Sell It

When Swiss Army created a store to basically sell items related to its iconic knife, the company came out with an entire shop built around their logo and sold clothing and accessories as well as knives. At a ski show in Las Vegas, Nev., I saw a ►

**Top left:** Alessi in New York. Other suppliers feel that if a general-type shop can’t show their items with the same degree of care that is exhibited in their name stores, they make their own. The shelf lighting might seem like a minor part of the thrilling use of space, but it is there on every shelf to give individual lighting to the item. What we have to learn is the need for all types of lighting, including fluorescent, to get the best use of the power used to the appeal to the customer. The mix of lighting in this shop is the key element in design. The care in the presentation of the merchandise tells a clear story about the company and the product. **Top right:** Sici’s in New York. This is a shop that sells all kinds of tiles, marble and mosaic. The showroom on the first floor is the most exciting fantasy of absolutely surreal art and sculpture. I know of the many extravaganzas put on in the nursery to welcome the new season, but one must see how a visual experience can be created. This store does it with glass tiles. We could do the same with plants. (Photos: Joseph Weishar)

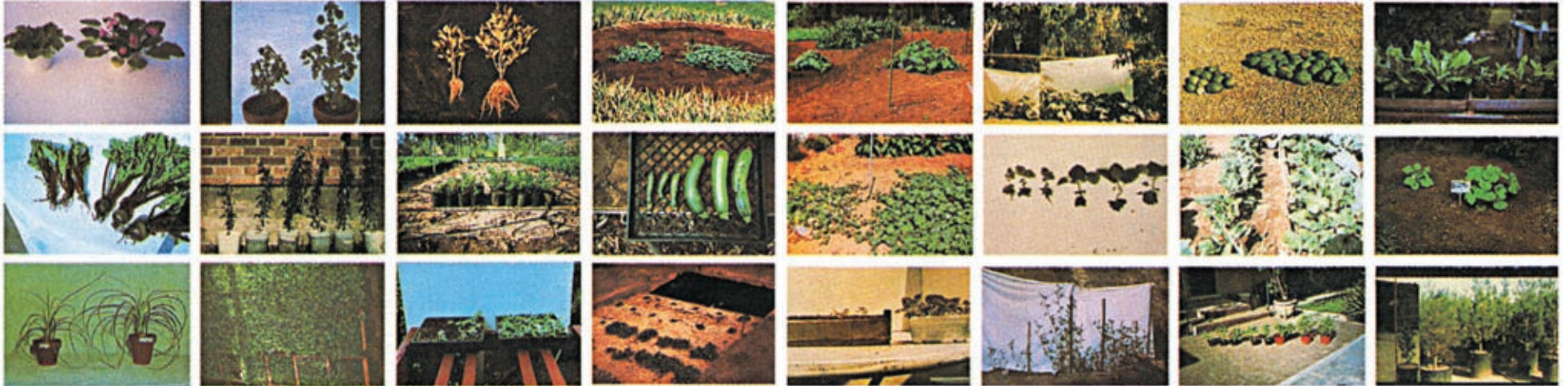


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mountain of gloves. They weren't piled high, but they all fit within the profile of a magic mountain display. I think you could easily paint a tree on the wall of your garden center and use the garden gloves as leaves or roots. Ideas translate from one industry to another. Trade shows are made for cross-fertilization of ideas. I guarantee that virtually any trade show could produce a thought or an item that would benefit sales and image in your shop.

## Get Creative

Work pants and coveralls have been in fashion since I started in business. Blue jeans were once only work pants. They morphed into reigning fashion. I doubt the same would happen to coveralls, but you can have fun with them and create a stuffed mannequin as a display. Aprons have made a beautiful display, and the interesting aspect to them is that they have been constantly upgraded with changes of sentiment as the years passed.

## Functionality First

It matters not to the gardener that they may get their hands or their clothing dirty. What

counts is not the approval of others because these items might never make it to a fashion show again. What matters is self-image of the user. They know when they buy something that it has been given the care and thought they apply to themselves when making choices on what to grow, how to lay it out, how much is enough. The intelligence to put together items for sale in an atmosphere that is conducive to and congratulatory for the level of personal appeal is the prime responsibility we have to our customers. 🐾

*Joseph Weishar is the founder and president of New Visions Studios in New York, N.Y. He is a firm believer that successful stores have an intuitive aesthetic balance. No matter what the merchandise, seamless presentation is a reflection of the unity of all parts of the retail organization. He can be reached at [newvisioninc@earthlink.net](mailto:newvisioninc@earthlink.net) or (212) 686-7200.*

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## Overalls

This capri overall, made of cotton/ rayon, features an outdoor print over a natural background. It has an adjustable waist, adjustable shoulder straps, side seam pockets, back pockets, left leg cargo pocket, bib pocket and hammer loops. Garden Gear. (888) 299-8843. **Write in 1421**



## Rose gloves

These rose gloves have an extended gauntlet for additional protection and are made from washable goatskin leather and tough-ex material. The gloves were designed by an orthopedic hand surgeon and carry Ease-of-Use Arthritis Foundation approval. Bionic Gloves. (877) 5-BIONIC. **Write in 1420**



## Slip-on shoe

The Classic LT is a slip-on shoe. It has a patented Grip-N-Go outsole designed with shallow channels and angled lugs, which are intended to give multidirectional traction plus the ability to pivot. Available colors are khaki and black. Whole and half sizes are available. LawnGrips. (877) 4-GRIPS-1. **Write in 1422**



## Hat

The Lattice Gardener is intended for both male and female customers. This hat is designed for sun protection with a UPF 50+ rating and is hand woven of durable palm. Tula Hats. (888) 232-4287. **Write in 1424**



## Cause-related gloves

These pink gardening gloves are designed to help benefit breast cancer research. For every pair of gloves sold, \$.70 will be donated to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. Atlas Glove Consumer Products. (800) 426-8860. **Write in 1419**



## Sun hat

This classic sun hat is designed with a 50+ UPF rating for sun protection. It is fully adjustable and has a wind lanyard and cooling vents. Sloggers. (877) 750-4437. **Write in 1423**



## Stretch gloves

These stretch gloves consist of colorful spandex tops with machine-washable micro suede. They have reinforced fingertips and lightly padded palms. Three colors are available. Womanswork. (800) 639-2709. **Write in 1426**



## Garden clogs

These garden clogs are part of the new "Sweet Nothin's" series. They feature a cupped heel for comfort, and the surface is intended to rinse clean. Available colors are soft orange, lime green and cobalt blue. Sizes range from ladies' 6 to 10. Midwest Gloves & Gear. (660) 646-2165. **Write in 1430** 🐾

## Landscape gloves

These gloves are intended for use with heavy-duty tasks, such as laying tile, building decks, cutting logs and hauling wood. They feature coated Kevlar reinforcements at wear points. West County Gardener. (800) 475-0567. **Write in 1425**



## Anti-insect shirt

This chambray is designed for gardening during summer months. It is made with an insect shield, which is intended to help protect against bugs, while a UV block aims to keep out 98 percent of the sun's UV rays. This shirt features a mesh-lined cape vent for breathability and roll-up sleeve tabs that convert the shirt from long to short sleeved. MUMZ Garden Apparel and Accessories. (206) 691-5243. **Write in 1428**

