



gardening with magic

Streamline the components of your miniatures lineup for retail success.

Every gardener knows that plants are magical. The way a new leaf unfurls, the way a parched plant comes back to life with a bit of water, the way some flowers close at night to open with the sun. The more time a person spends around plants, the more they begin to notice and understand the tiny and enchanting details. Some things might just have to be seen before believed!

These days with busy schedules and space-efficient lifestyles, many people never have the chance to get near a garden, much less have one of their own. There is a generation of young professionals ready to tackle the world, yet they've never had the chance to tackle a patch of bindweed!

This is where the magic of miniatures casts its spell. Miniature gardens are the perfect way to bring a tiny bit of the outside landscape down to a scale where it can be watched, cared for and appreciated every single day. Miniature gardens are the perfect introduction for a future gardener to meet their new best friend ... a plant.

Immediate Interest

We've learned over the years through our retail garden center that the initial attraction is the most important part. Once a customer looks away, they may never look back.

To hook a new plant lover and reel them in, there has to be something special that makes them stop and wonder what exactly they're looking at, something magical they have never

seen before, something that makes them think they could take home a living creation that is completely unique, something that makes them fall in love.

One of the easiest ways this can be accomplished is with variety. Just as each garden outside has its own story and quirks, so should each miniature garden. Which sounds like it could turn into a production nightmare!

As a wholesale grower of miniature plants and gardens, we've found a few magic tricks to streamline a product mix that appears "onesie-twosie" at first glance but is actually production friendly.

The Plants

First, the plants. If you're not familiar with lines such as the Fairy Flowers plants, you should be. The beauty of this program is that it offers more than 50 varieties of plants that are perfectly suited for miniature gardens. Each specific variety comes with its own tag, which features a character and unique story tied to that plant.

We've seen the plants become like collector's items: Customers return time and time again to see what new "personalities" we're growing that they don't have yet.

Also, varying the size and shape of plants in your assortment is key.

You can plant a lot of unique garden designs using just a few upright "tree" varieties, a few midsize "shrubs" and several low-growing "groundcovers."

Use the different habits of the miniature plants to mimic the outside landscape, creating tiny landscape designs within a small container. The plants might be the same, but each garden can look dramatically different.

The Colors

The other easy way to achieve the appearance of variety is through color. Your customer's eye will go directly to the color of a garden container



or the furniture within a garden every time, which lets you be a bit more repetitive on the plants.

We paint all of our garden boxes in different colors, so that if we do a rep of 10 gardens, no two boxes are alike.

This allows us to use the same varieties of plants throughout all of the gardens, but they'll look different just because of the color container they're in and the furniture that they are surrounding.

Ultimately we've found that new plant lovers, especially in the Millennial generation, want to start with a plant or garden that is unique and specifically tailored to them.

They want to believe that they just procured a one-of-a-kind work of living art that exists nowhere else in the world. They want it to be a conversation piece, something alive and beautiful in a tiny (and easy-to-care-for) package that no one else has ever seen. They want to believe in magic ... what better place to find it than in a garden!

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This series — Fresh Perspectives — provides garden center tips from Generations X and Y. Beth Gulley was a member of GPN's 40 Under 40 Class of 2014. For more information, visit www.gpnmag.com/40-under-40.