

# GOT PLANTS?

As the Plant Something campaign adds more partners, garden centers see the value of the program as a marketing tool.



**F**ive years ago, business slowed for garden centers across Arizona much as it did for the rest of the country.

Looking for a way to increase sales for its members, the Arizona Nursery Association (ANA) received a Specialty Crop Block Grant for a plant and landscape marketing program.

Shortly thereafter, Plant Something was born.

“Once it became Plant Something and I had the materials in my hand, and I showed them to my fellow executive directors across the United States, that’s when it changed to: ‘Oh my gosh, this could be national,’” says Cheryl Goar, executive director of the ANA.

Eighteen partners across the country, from California to New Jersey and everywhere in between, are now participating. And garden centers are embracing the bright green stakes.

“I’ve always liked the ‘Beef. It’s What’s For Dinner’ concept and the ‘Got Milk?’ ads from a marketing strategy standpoint,” says Jay Harper, owner of Harper’s Landscape & Gardening Centre in

Scottsdale, Arizona. “We think this might be our industry’s chance at developing the same kind of force.”

The program has two components. First, state associations are reaching out directly to the consumer in hopes of driving them to the garden center. Second, garden centers and landscaping contractors are using materials within their operation as recognizable marketing.

### One Unified Voice

The Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association (MNLA) and the Massachusetts Flower Growers’ Association have come together with Plant Something to try to move the needle for the consumer.

“We’re not the size of a Coca-Cola and so moving that needle as a small state association had never amounted to much,” says Rena Sumner, MNLA executive director.

“Plant Something had so many great components to it that it was a strong message, and we knew that if every state could take it, you’d have that kind of educational marketing component that would have one voice. The voice is that without plants, you’ve got nothing.”



Harper’s Landscape & Gardening Centre



Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association



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## MARKETING



Top: Plant Something apparel either with or without a garden center's logo can be seen at some retailers throughout the country, including Harper's Landscape & Gardening Centre. Right: Idaho used health messages on its Plant Something billboards. Far Right: Digital billboards in Arizona remain for eight seconds and add some humor to the Plant Something campaign.

Bemis Farms Nursery in Spencer, Massachusetts, has jumped on board with Plant Something's presence at the Boston Flower and Garden Show.

Attendees put dirt and a seed in a planting cup, and then they have to visit the state's Plant Something website ([www.plantsomethingma.com](http://www.plantsomethingma.com)) in order to find out what kind of seed they are growing.

Last year, 15,000 people came into the booth, and this March, the approach was not only to create buzz but also to learn something about the consumer.

"This year, our focus is a little more on talking to people and finding out if they're gardening already. Just because they're going to a flower show doesn't mean they garden," says Tina Bemis, co-owner of Bemis Farms Nursery.

"If they come into our garden center, almost by definition they're already wanting to plant something because they're there."

Massachusetts also gets consumers involved with a Plant Something day in May.

"We challenge every city and town to plant something on May 15, and we've had some really great success with that," says Sumner. "This is going to be the third year and this year the focus is going to be on the schools."

### One Catchy Message

A younger demographic is exactly the target market with Plant Something.

"Our market demo is really 25 to 54," Goar says. "That's why Plant Something is kind of fun and whimsical, and the humor is there to really try to attract the younger person."

In addition to the stakes, some taglines include "Do Something Shady, Plant Something" and "Do Something Dirty, Plant Something."

These taglines can be seen on digital billboards in the Phoenix area and garden center trucks throughout the states.

Ken Lain, owner of Watters Garden Center in Prescott, Arizona, has incorporated Plant Something into his hour-long radio program every weekend with 30-second and 60-second commercials.

"We are a garden center, but really we're a marketing machine," Lain says. "Any message like this that I can hang my hat on and create a story around is a positive thing. We're looking for messages to latch onto; it's unique, different and local, independent."

Watters Garden Center also uses the stakes throughout its store, especially where Lain hopes to create more drama. The stakes are outdoors, up where there is a lot of mulch, and also on end-cap displays.

Massachusetts is currently working on ways to incorporate a new piece



in the Plant Something campaign that shows people there's more than one reason to plant.

"It's the piece that tells people why," Bemis says. "Are you hungry? Plant something. Do you want beauty? Plant something. Want to sell your house faster? Plant something. Need more oxygen? Plant something."

The Idaho Nursery and Landscape Association (INLA) has focused on health messages as a

reason to plant.

The state's first Specialty Crop Block Grant went to banners and stakes for garden centers to put around their stores and the second went to billboards with health messages.

These billboards were then made into smaller banners for all the retailers.

"We're trying to push people to the garden centers, and that's my tout for retailers," says

Ann Bates, executive director of the INLA. "We're getting them interested, so that they go to their garden centers and you can sell to them."

Consumers can go to the main Plant Something website ([www.plant-something.org](http://www.plant-something.org)) and then be directed to each of the states where they find listings of the garden centers closest to them.

Idaho also distributes flipbooks at home and garden shows, botanical gardens and other public

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## WHERE ARE YOU?

If you are in a state that is part of the program, you could have access to Plant Something materials for your garden center.

If you aren't in one of these states, you can see if your state association is aware of the program or is in the process of adopting it.

### CURRENT PARTNERS INCLUDE:

- Arizona Nursery Association
- Arkansas Green Industry Association
- British Columbia Nursery & Landscape Association
- California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers
- Colorado Nursery & Greenhouse Association
- Idaho Nursery & Landscape Association
- Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association
- Georgia Green Industry Association
- Long Island Flower Growers Association
- Massachusetts Nursery & Landscape Association
- Minnesota Nursery & Landscape Association
- Montana Nursery & Landscape Association
- New Jersey Nursery & Landscape Association
- North Carolina Nursery & Landscape Association
- Ohio Nursery & Landscape Association
- Oregon Association of Nurseries
- Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association
- Washington State Nursery & Landscape Association

places. These books list retail locations, landscape contractors, arborists and other service people in the industry.

### One End Goal

A lot of the legwork has already been done in creating a singular message, and the hope is that garden centers can take advantage of the materials with ease.

Harper's Landscape & Gardening Centre has its staff wear T-shirts with Plant Something logos on them and has wrapped its vehicles with the signs, often alongside its own logo.

"A lot of the materials like bumper stickers and plant stakes are free for the garden center; you just have to choose to use them," Harper says.

"It's just a matter of making the decision you're going to incorporate them into your marketing."

Participating partners share all of the artwork among themselves so as not to duplicate efforts.

Some of the newest marketing materials are videos, which came from Idaho's Specialty Crop Block Grant but can be seen on the main Plant Something website and on the websites and social media pages of many member garden centers.

Goar hopes that the Specialty Crop Block Program will continue to be funded, and a new Multi-State Project Competition to this program could help break down some of the state barriers for printing materials.

"Long-term, my board and I have as a goal funding that is not all solely based on federal

government funds," Goar says. "They'd like to find a way the industry is actively involved in this."

Bemis says that there's a need for all the members to get together to figure out the next step, but the framework is there.

"My particular town and the town next to me happen to have a lot of people participating, so when you drive down the road, you see Plant Something multiple times, and that's the key. It's not just seeing it once, it's the repetition," Bemis says.

"If that green stake with yellow lettering was all over the country, then how could that be a bad thing?" **LGR**



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