

From Dumpsters to Displays

Believe it or not, worn out fixtures are in demand and can be the perfect pick-me-up to a boring display.

By Pete Mihalek

The next time you walk by your dumpster — or any dumpster for that matter — take a peek inside for some inspiration. Seriously.

Barbara Florig, Al's Garden Center's visual merchandising manager, says "dumpster diving" can be a perfect way to find display props when you're working with a limited design budget.

In the following Q&A, Florig shares with *Lawn & Garden Retailer* her thoughts on repurposing worn-out items into important display elements.

Have you always repurposed old items into displays at Al's Garden Center?

Florig: As long as I've been here, we've never really made a budget for props. I started finding old woods and items out of dumpsters, which helped add structure to the displays we were creating.

It's amazing how many things you can find on the side of the road.

Where do you typically turn for inspiration when working with these unlikely display props?

Florig: Anthropologie is great. I recommend

garden centers make it a point to walk through an Anthropologie just to see what they're doing. I check them every season. Their merchandisers do amazing work — things we can easily replicate or rework to make our own.

I also subscribe to design blogs like www.trendland.net. It's a great site and daily newsletter that meshes arts and retail, and it sometimes has really good ideas.

Where do you have luck finding these props?

Florig: For example, if I'm looking for old bicycle wheels, I'll contact the local trash company we have here in Sherwood (Oregon) and let them know. Then they save them for me. The same goes for the recycling centers in our area.

Last August, I called them looking for an old stove for Al's big holiday setup. Not long after the call, they found one for me.

I keep my ear to the radar for retail places that are closing, too.

For two years I wanted a mannequin but we couldn't afford to buy one because they can be rather expensive. Then I found a garden center

out in the middle of nowhere that was closing. They had a mannequin.

There was another place way out in the country that had an old row boat. Well, I always felt an old row boat full of flowers for spring would be fabulous. The boat came with oars and they sold it to me for \$25. It was a great find.

What is your rule of thumb when using such items?

Florig: You've got to keep it understated. This approach falls under the less is more mantra. Remember, what you're selling. You're selling the plants.

Some of my favorite pieces to use are the ones that are more vertical, and that's why I like to use doors and windows — items that are taller. I like anything that's rusted or has been left out in the elements. It has that earthy feel to it.

Sometimes if a piece starts to look really bad, we paint it. It's also easy to throw on a coat of paint to make it pop in a display and maybe pick up on a color in one of the plants.

We've also painted and then sanded pieces to give them that old, worn look. **LGR**



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