

Let me explain...

...what mannequin containers are and why they're an important part of our displays at A Proper Garden.

By Bob Van Cura, A Proper Garden

The first time I'd ever heard the term "mannequin containers" in our industry was during a presentation given by (garden center design specialist) Judy Sharpton.

The concept for using a mannequin has been around for a long time. Much in a way the department stores would dress a mannequin in a clothing ensemble, which helps to sell a total package or at least give the feel of a complete package.

We try to look at containers in that same light. We try to position them to create this look, to inspire people to buy them or replicate them at home.

In a practical sense we're trying to show our customers that it is more than just putting one plant into one pot. It is a little bit more thought out than lining a few odds-n-ends pots up in a row. Our goal is to inspire them to buy some collection of either the plants and potting soil or the pottery — or with any luck, all of the above.

Go Big...At Home

In many cases, our mannequin pots are larger than average pots. After 20 some years of working with people on this, one of my beliefs is that people tend to undersize containers in their landscape.

For example, a customer might have this two-story brick entrance with 10-inch terra cotta pots. It just doesn't work.

With a mannequin display, it's really about showing them what's possible. To show them how good something can look in a bigger scale. Now it's our philosophy that everything in the store is for sale, and those big containers do sell and do tend to sell as a unit.

It will happen when a customer walks in and simply says to us, "I want that." Now we're talking about a \$1,500 to \$2,000 price point for containers and plants. Our mannequin displays allow us to have that initial contact with the customer. They see it, they like it.

It may not happen everyday, but people will

come in to buy a grouping of containers, just as they are.

But that's not your typical customer — just as there are people who have gone into department stores and picked one or two items off a mannequin to buy and not everything from head to toe.

Foot in the Door

For some people, our mannequin containers become a self-service function where they get some ideas from it and then head to the benches to buy the plants. More times than not, it's an introduction and they start to buy into the idea that they really do need to buy pottery and containers on a bigger scale. They really do need a bigger show.

These mannequins have been great starting points for our designers, too. We work with a lot of high-end customers. A lot of their container gardening is done on site and is relationship built. We've worked with some of these customers for a decade now.

This display concept has been a good platform for us and our designers when it comes to working with our customers to customize their containers to fit their landscape needs. 🌿



A Proper Garden's use of mannequin containers are an introduction, which helps customers buy into the idea that they need to buy pottery and containers on a bigger scale. "They really do need a bigger show."



Make It Work

Judy Sharpton, garden center design specialist and owner of Growing Places Marketing, explains the mannequin concept requires two equally important components to be effective:

1) The display mannequin and ingredient products must be displayed in close proximity.

2) The second part of the technique is the element first adopters like Bob Van

Cura began incorporating to such an advantage. Retailers who persist in traditional product arrangements — annuals, perennials and shrubs in distinct and often widely dispersed departments — cannot implement this concept to their advantage; finding the ingredient products is too hard and time consuming for the customer and the staff.