

What Naturally Urban Means at Linder's

By Pete Mihalek



Naturally Urban — that name has a nice ring to it, doesn't it? This is what the team at Linder's Garden Center, St. Paul, Minn., is calling their newest store-within-a-store concept.

Naturally Urban is a makeshift apartment centrally located in Linder's under-cover retail space and is merchandised to inspire shoppers facing limited gardening space.

One week after Mother's Day, *Lawn & Garden Retailer* caught up with a busy Anna Linder to get the scoop on how Naturally Urban is functioning in its first year of implementation.

How did the concept of Naturally Urban come to fruition?

Anna Linder: We came up with the idea a year ago. My brother and I are fourth generation in this family company and we've been exposed to the garden center since we could remember.

We're both recent college graduates, and we don't have big houses and yards or a lot of money to spend on plants, so we picked up on a need for smaller-spaced gardening.

When I lived in an apartment and I worked for our Flower Marts (Linder's pop-up locations), people always asked me, "Do you garden?" I'd say, "No, I wish. I live in an apartment and don't have any space to garden." Our goal is to help people in situations like that.

Can you describe the structure that showcases this new urban gardening department?

Linder: It's basically a mock apartment that's 600 square feet with a sun porch, living room, tiny kitchen and a deck.

We merchandise the apartment in a way to show shoppers how to use the product we're selling. And everything in the apartment is for sale and can be found in larger quantities elsewhere in the store.

Naturally Urban is in a place that formerly had a lot of pottery. We're not compromising any business by adding this new department. You know, we're incorporating many of those pots and bringing them in and using them in the apartment.

Has this new addition affected the overall tone of the garden center in any way?

Linder: For awhile it was kind of a challenge working it in because we've always been this traditional garden center. So bringing Naturally Urban in and introducing such a young, fresh look, we were kind of worried about how we were going to incorporate this into the store.

How do we create a border? Or do we eliminate the border? Right now we're just letting it blend into the rest of the garden center and have our garden center take on more lifestyle merchandising. For example, we'll showcase a table full of paths but we'll have a few that are in really pretty pots, which lends us to cross merchandise more.

A lot of what's on display in the apartment we have carried before in the garden center, it's just that many of our customers never considered using it in their spaces until they see it worked into our own small space.

In attempts to appeal to younger and/or more urban-style gardeners, where are you going for merchandising inspiration?

Linder: A lot of relationships we already have with vendors have been extremely helpful. They are recognizing this department and suggesting products from their lines that would do well for an urban/small-space gardener, which is cool.

We use the Internet for ideas, too. Pinterest is my go-to. Everything I do is on Pinterest. While Naturally Urban has its own Facebook page, it's actually much more active on Pinterest because it's so visually inspiring.

And Naturally Urban isn't all about selling all the time. We're also using this space to show customers DIY projects — magnetic cork planters to hanging gutter gardens to cinder block stackable gardens.

These things aren't necessarily sales-based, but they're there to get customers inspired to try new things in their limited spaces. With Naturally Urban, we're doing our best to get them to explore new ways to garden even with limitations at home. **LGR**

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