

make the **MOST** of berries

Get the biggest bang from your berry shrub display with these garden retailer suggestions.

By Susan McCoy

Berries are big. Whether thrown into a fruit smoothie or eaten by the handful, the benefits of blueberries, raspberries and the like are front and center for today's families. They're healthy and delicious, something that pleases both parents and their children.

What pleases garden centers is these berries are easy to grow and accessible to all gardeners, no matter their available space. The challenge for the retailer now becomes this: How do we bring attention to those berry plants in the garden center?

Berry-Themed Events

In early June, Millcreek Gardens of Salt Lake City, Utah, held a Raspberry Shortcake Day event to promote the sale of Raspberry Shortcake, a new dwarf thornless raspberry variety in Fall Creek Farm & Nursery's BrazelBerries Collection. In addition to the Raspberry Shortcake shrubs, Millcreek also offered customers real raspberry shortcakes.

Staff set up two round tables of Raspberry Shortcake shrubs in Millcreek's courtyard entry. Adjacent was a tent under which they served shortcakes topped with raspberries, sauce and whipped cream. "As people came in we asked them if they'd like some raspberry shortcake," explains Sawyer. "While they were standing there eating we were able to talk to them about the plants." They sold 70 Raspberry Shortcake shrubs that day.

Sawyer says having a representative from Monrovia, their supplier, was key to the day's



This BrazelBerries display at Shorty's Garden + Home was kept completely separate from other green goods and was touted as patio edible hors d'oeuvres. The staff potted a few of them up in ceramic pots and created a sign that read: "All you need to do is provide the ice cream."

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MERCHANDISING



Millcreek Gardens held an event to promote the sale of new dwarf thornless raspberry variety called Raspberry Shortcake. Guests were introduced to this new variety while served shortcakes topped with raspberries, sauce and whipped cream.

success. "[George] was here and he's a great talker," says Sawyer, complimenting the rep for sharing the shrub's benefits with customers.

Sawyer estimates they spent less than \$300 on the event, mostly for food costs. Event promotion consisted of postings on social media sites, as well as mentions by the owner during her regularly scheduled local news appearances.

The event is somewhat responsible for the sale of 300 to 400 of those shrubs throughout the season. "We'll probably do it again next year," Sawyer says of the event, "and maybe also try something with blueberry bushes."

Stay Stocked

One way to draw attention to a product is to stock it in large numbers in a clearly visible location within the store. Think of the supermarkets' snack displays prior to

"the big game" — a shopper can't miss it.

Yamagami's Nursery in Cupertino, Calif., used this same stocking technique when merchandising its berry bushes; in this case it was also the Raspberry Shortcake shrubs. According to Yamagami's Preston Oka, they displayed the shrubs in a prime location, stocking at least 50 units in this spot and drawing attention to it with 2-by-3-foot point-of-purchase (POP) materials.

Oka committed to an order of 400 plants on the spot for delivery in 100-unit batches from late winter through summer. "I think just the physical presence of 50-100 units at any given time told people this was a great item," Oka says. He adds that it is key for other buyers to consider if and how many they could sell through the season and to stagger the order so there is fresh product throughout the sales season.

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MERCHANDISING

BERRY BENEFITS AT A GLANCE

Here are a few of the benefits of berries to include on your own signage.



Blueberries* may play a role in:

- Cardiovascular health
- Brain health
- Insulin response
- Cancer risk reduction

Blueberries* are:

- Low in fat
- Full of fiber
- Packed with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties
- Chock full of Vitamin C
- A good source of Manganese

*Source: The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council

Raspberries* are:

- High in Vitamin C
- A good source of folate
- Cholesterol free
- Low in fat and calories
- High in fiber

Raspberries* may play a role in:

- Cardiovascular health
- Boosting immunity
- Increasing enzyme activity
- Slowing aging
- Cancer risk reduction

*Source: North American Raspberry & Blackberry Association

Say It With Signage

Down to Earth Home, Garden & Gift in Eugene, Ore., used signage to help sell their berry plants. "I can't emphasize enough how important signage is because it's like the secret salesperson with berries," says manager Chris Donahue. Down to Earth was able to download POP materials from the breeder, Fall Creek Farm & Nursery, and was then able to print, laminate and post this signage near its three-tiered display of 2-gallon raspberry bushes and 1-gallon pots of blueberries. Messaging helps customers understand why these may be priced higher than other berry plants.

Down to Earth also displayed Fall Creek's fact sheets explaining the health benefits of blueberries. Donahue says an artistic staff member created bullet-point-type signage with these facts that really grabbed the shopper's attention.

"I think a lot of [our berry sales] had to do with letting the public know what's coming, when it came

in, and why you'd want that plant," says Donahue. "At \$34.99 for a 2-gallon pot of Raspberry Shortcake, many staff thought it would be a hard sell. But [Raspberry Shortcake] was in the magazines, there was a newspaper article about them 10 days before they reached the nursery, and we sold out of our 75 pots in less than two weeks." Down to Earth uses Facebook and local advertising to get the word out about upcoming deliveries.

Consumer demand for "grown your own" berries and edibles is there, even if it's just under the surface. These three tactics can help the demand for edibles catch fire with customers. **LGR**

Susan McCoy is president and founder of Garden Media Group, offering innovative PR campaigns designed to build brands in home and garden, horticulture, outdoor living, lawn and landscape industries. You can reach her at susan@gardenmediagroup.com.