

# Let me explain...

...the unique signage at Baker's Acres Greenhouse and how it helps create a memorable shopping experience.

By Sarah Baker

**F**rom our diverse and unusual plant selection right down to our signs, we try to be as original as possible here at Baker's Acres Greenhouse in Alexandria, Ohio. It's our hope that this sets us apart and gives us an edge over more traditional greenhouses, as well as the larger big box stores.

We are pretty nutty here and we end up attracting a lot of equally nutty plant people as our customer base, which has worked out well. It goes to show, it pays to be yourself. We want someone's visit here to be a remarkable and memorable experience so that they return. And we believe this can be accomplished in the smallest of details, like our handwritten in-house signs.

## The Artistic Process

We started creating unique signs once our selection became big enough to warrant more departments. Ten years ago we only offered a few flats of a few types of succulents. Now we have a huge display. I think no matter how small you are, a good sign can really help sell your goods.

Inspiration for our signs can come from almost anywhere. One of my most valuable tools is this great old font booklet from the 1940s — back when most signs were hand printed. Old advertisements and logos are a good source as well, because computers weren't involved and the human touch really shines through.

From chalkboards to old mirrors, we have used a wide range of materials for signs. Basically, any flat surface that paint or marker can stick to can be

used as a sign. Being creative can save you money and resources, too. For example, in our vegetable house we have department signs made from salvaged windows that were free. But for a majority of our signs we use a corrugated plastic board called Coroplast. It's available from horticultural suppliers as well as big craft stores. It comes in large sheets that you can easily cut to any size you want, it's relatively inexpensive, re-usable and can last a long time if well taken care of.

My carpenter uncle custom made wooden frames that the Coroplast can easily slide in and out of. We then write on the Coroplast with water-based paint markers. The brand we like is Zig Posterman markers. The ink is waterproof but can easily be erased with a glass cleaner like Windex. The colors do fade after a season or two depending on how much sun exposure they get but that's something we can easily touch up.

## A Who's Who in Signage

Some of our signs are personalized because we have different people in charge of growing different things. Most growers usually have a passion for a certain kind of plant. My brother Nick Baker is totally obsessed with succulents and it's the reason why we have such an amazing collection of them and the sign "Nick's Succulents" to introduce them. A former grower of ours, Dave Morris, is responsible for the impressive array of fancy-leaved begonias we carry, so one sign still reads: "Dave's Specialty Begonias."

We do get a fair amount of positive feedback

from customers and colleagues alike. Some people really seem to get a kick out of them and even ask where we purchased them, not realizing we made them.

I'm most proud of the signs from our vegetable house, because I was able to re-use some old salvaged windows to make them and the effect turned out really well.

## Steady Hand

If you're looking to add a unique touch to your signage, turn to your staff. You might be surprised to find one or more of your employees have artistic and creative talents (or even good penmanship) that you were not previously aware of because it never came up.

Also, those of you trying your hand at signage, remember practice makes perfect. When it comes to signs, I think the public is easily impressed. As long as the sign is readable, clear and bright, and the size of the lettering correctly fills the space, people will like it. It doesn't have to be anymore complicated or fancy than that.

I think our signs at Baker's Acres Greenhouse reflect and reinforce our mission of striving to be a garden center that breaks the mold and colors outside the lines with a real do-it-yourself approach. ✂

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