

A Personal Touch

An engraved stone or monogrammed planter is worth much more in the eyes of your customers, who often feel an emotional connection to their gardens. By stocking up on unique, personalized garden gifts, you can set yourself apart from the competition.

By *Darhiana Mateo*



Stone décor

These terra cotta stone and moss green-finished ornaments, statuary pieces and planters are designed to look striking in a garden setting but should be brought indoors at the time of frost to avoid cracking or breakage. The pictured items must be purchased in increments of two and measure 5 x 6 x 9 inches. Napa Home & Garden. www.napahomeandgarden.com (888) 892-2323. **Write in 1461**



Skin care collection

Body Organic is a full line of USDA-certified organic skin care. The full line has 69 total products including body wash, body cream, lotion, body mist, hand wash, hand cream and hand sanitizer. Products are offered in 10 different fruit and floral scents that are naturally derived from organic fruits or plants. No synthetic fragrances are used. Nature's Paradise. www.naturesparadiseparadiseorganics.com (866) 979-2557. **Write in 1462**



Eco-friendly bags

Jute Bags are made of natural fibers and are designed to be more durable than one-time use plastic bags. Choose from a variety of styles, colors and sizes; then personalize it with a logo or pattern. The Jute Line includes shopping bags, promotional bags, wine bags and more. Double L Group, Ltd. www.doublel.com (800) 553-4102. **Write in 1460**



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extra touch; something they can't find in the big box store down the street. More garden centers are beginning to carry personalized garden gifts and customers appear to be willing to spend a few extra bucks for a more unique product.

In particular, many garden centers are experiencing success selling engraved stones, often as a way to memorialize a deceased loved one or pet — such as a stone engraved with “Planted in celebration of our mother’s life” — or simply to inspire with uplifting quotes. The demand for personalized wind chimes, planters, birdhouses and other popular garden gifts might be rising, but at Bachman’s Floral, Home and Garden, memorial stones are the “biggest sellers,” says Rebecca Brown, senior buyer for the Minnesota-based chain.

The stones strike an emotional chord with customers, who are often seeking a way to celebrate the life of their lost loved ones and want to dedicate a space in their gardens for that purpose. And it makes sense, considering that many gardeners feel a personal connection to their gardens. “They put so much time into it. It becomes a refuge,” Brown says. “It can become a very big expression of sentiment, of things that you’ve done in your life and places you’ve been — almost like a photo book.” In fact, the Kay Berry garden stones line is Bachman’s most often reordered garden décor item.

Adding Value

A stone is just a stone; a wind chime just another wind chime crooning in the breeze. But a monogrammed weathervane, customized birdfeeder or engraved stone can be worth so much more to your customers. Stocking unique, personalized garden gift items that truly resonate with that individual customer not only adds value to your product offerings but also can keep customers coming back for that coveted personal touch.

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Selling Sentimentality

Some garden centers, such as the Michigan-based English Gardens franchise, are seeing profit from “selling sentimentality.” The personalized Kay Berry garden stone collection that English Gardens carries, part of an extensive garden décor department that includes wind chimes, fountains and statues, are very popular with customers, says Jennifer Youngquest, marketing manager. “People are always looking for the unique and different,” Youngquest says. “It requires a little extra work, but the rewards are great for satisfying a customer’s wants and needs.”

Instead of just buying a regular stone to accent their backyards, customers can go that extra mile and purchase a personalized stone, engraved with a saying — ranging from the whimsical to the wise — that resonates with them.

Terry Wasson, vice president of Kay Berry, a manufacturing company, says the increasingly popular personalized garden gifts are the “next step up” for customers and retailers alike. In the eyes of customers, “It’s a bit more upscale,” she says. And for retailers like you, it’s a chance to grow your bottom line: “It increases [garden centers’] price point, and it’s not taking up any extra space. They can sell a stone for \$49.95 or sell the same personalized stone for \$99.95. It increases profits all around.”

Hot Commodities

Basically, any garden décor item can be personalized — through monogramming, engraving or some other customization — and demand a higher price. Companies like Kay Berry, Inc., Whitehall Products and GardenAge Supply manufacture these personalized items and supply them to garden centers, among other customers. Over time, many garden centers have started diversifying their inventory and offering customers that