

# COLOR Your World

Merchandising by color is a surefire way to trigger positive customer reactions with vibrant hues that help draw them in and personalize their garden lifestyle.

By Ron Greening and Jessica Reinhardt



Color-coordinated displays in bold hues serve as hooks, drawing your customers in.

**L**egend has it that Henry Ford said, "You can have any color you want, as long as it's black," in regards to the production of his Model-T automobile. While untrue, this legend makes a great point. In most of the products we purchase today, color is an important component of why we buy what we do. Color is how consumers make their purchase personal and different, something special to them. Consumers can now customize their purchases right at the store. They can buy color "skins" for their iPods or get colored shells for their cell phones. In a time when independent garden centers are faced with the challenge of differentiating themselves from the big boxes — where everything looks the same — carrying products in colors aside from traditional gardening green can make a large difference in the look and feel of your store.

## Color Caché

Merchandising by color has an impact on today's consumer like never before. Customers are often willing to pay a premium to get their favorite color. We sell plants in bloom because people are drawn to the color. Great time and effort is put into producing just the right plant in just the right color. Garden centers now paint poinsettias to achieve colors that can't be created through breeding. A lot of effort is put into plant color.

## MERCHANDISING



Place displays using the colors of plant material along with decorative items and outdoor living pieces to create an exciting lifestyle display.

Are you putting this kind of thought and effort into the color and style of the other items in your store? It is not only the decorative items that you should

scrutinize. Everyday items such as tools and watering products can benefit from a splash of color. Try tying the plant colors in with colors and styles of other items to show a complete package. This increases the appeal — and sales — of all items. Make every effort to coordinate colors together in the store. Place displays using the colors of plant material along with decorative items and outdoor living pieces to showcase all products together and make a great lifestyle display. Customers like lifestyle displays that give them visual cues of how all the products can be used. Color trends are always changing, but there are many good resources to help you stay on top of them, including the Color Marketing Group ([www.colormarketing.org](http://www.colormarketing.org)). Fashion colors do not always transfer well to gardening, but paying attention to these trends can pay dividends, especially as more wearables, such as hats, gloves and shoes, enter our channel of trade.

### "We're Not in Kansas Anymore"

Color can be the "hook" that ▶

## Narrow Aisles

Aisle width is a very important issue. Greenhouses have historically had narrow aisles to maximize growing space. The more plants you can fit into the structure, the lower the cost of production per plant. This, on the surface, would seem to be good for business. But studies have shown that shoppers value personal space. The general results of these studies are that customers dislike narrow aisles. They feel cramped and uncomfortable. No one likes their personal space to be violated. Narrow aisles that cause customers to brush each other as they pass, will actually make women leave the store immediately. This is counterproductive if we wish shoppers to take their time and examine all of the products in the store. You need to find a balance in your store that takes the shopper's comfort into consideration, yet makes your store an efficient place to work.



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draws attention. Think of how people felt when they first saw The Wizard of Oz in a movie theater. Movies had been only in black and white for most of their lives, and then...color! You can achieve the same results of wonder and awe when you apply

color to items that are otherwise common and ordinary. You can also use this "hook" to draw attention to an area and route traffic past it.

If your customers come to your store to purchase plant material, how do you make sure they have

contact with the other items that you have to sell? Why are the milk and eggs at the back corners of the grocery store? One strategy is to place the must-have items in a manner that draws people through the store. It is tempting to put the "bread-and-butter"

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Applying color to items that are otherwise common and ordinary makes them more noticeable.

items up front so the customers will see and have easy access to them. But spreading these items out, and featuring items along the way, is a great way to get shoppers to explore the whole store. If these displays and items are in color, they additionally draw people in and make them stop to look. Color can spice up these displays and make them more noticeable. A display of shepherd hooks in earth brown may get glanced over, but the same products in bright colors — or displayed with hanging baskets filled with trailing plants in gorgeous colors — will definitely stop traffic! And have you seen the tomato cages in color?

#### Supplement the Basics

Color, however, is not the only answer. Paying attention to the basics of merchandising along with the addition of color will bring about amazing results. Is your garden center mother-in-law approved? Your first-time visitors are much like the mother-in-law popping in for a visit. They will be checking every detail of your garden center, deciding whether they like your style and products. Glancing over your store layout, they walk down each aisle looking at the different varieties of plants and tools that will supply their gardening adventure.

Developing a friendly, inviting and clean atmosphere is what brings customers back. Good housekeeping is a must. Many garden centers today fall into the situation of spending all of their employee's time on plants and leaving the hard goods in the dust...literally. It is not uncommon to find dirty ►

shovels, rakes and watering tools lying on the ground. It's no secret that garden centers tend to be dirty. Garden centers located outside are especially dirty and dusty. Dirt tends to fly in the air landing on the hard

goods. Customers are less likely to pick up items and purchase them if they are dirty. Detail and clean up your merchandise on a regular basis.

Customers like to purchase shiny, new merchandise. Dusty

and dirty products mean low interest and low sell-through. Make sure the aisles are picked up. Daily maintenance of plants leaves aisles filled with excess dirt, used watering tools and gardening equipment. Customers

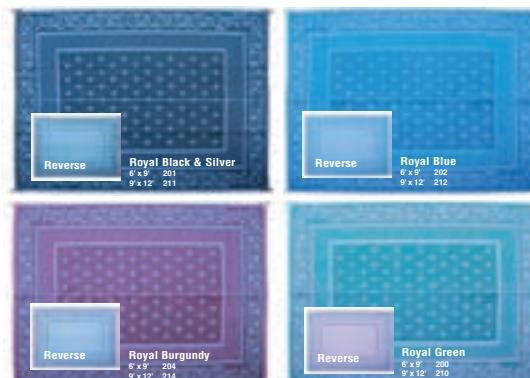
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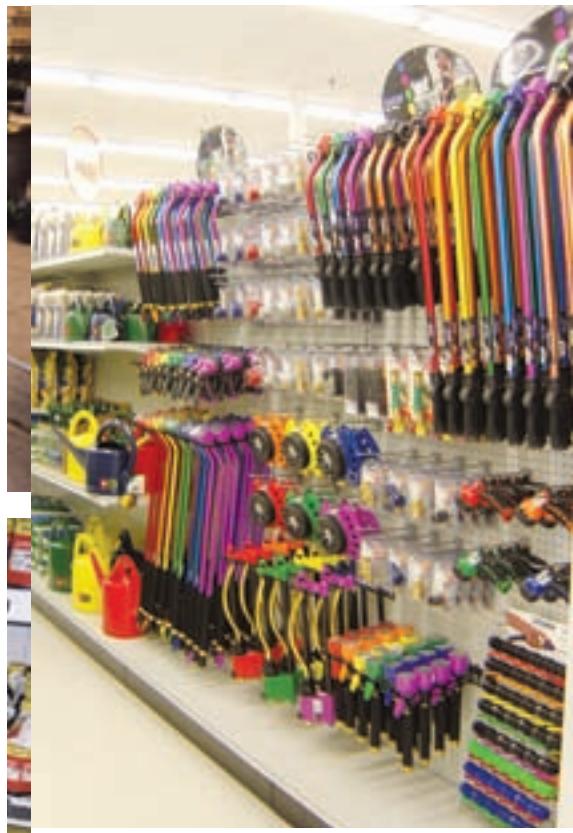
**Top:** Make sure your employees plan time to detail and clean up aisles and merchandise.  
**Bottom:** Customers like to purchase shiny, new merchandise.

will not go down cluttered aisles. Have employees plan some time to check the aisles and pick up anything that is on the floor. They should also wipe down and detail the garden tools.

### Create Accessible, Durable Displays

With or without color, displaying products in a garden center setting can be a challenge. Peg hook gondolas end up in the way, or in an out-of-the-way area with little traffic. During their visit, customers pick up different tools and accessories to examine. How comfortable are they? How do they fit in their hands? Do they like the weight, color and style? Are your tools easily accessible?

Resist the temptation to put tools or products in pots scattered randomly around the store. These items look like closeouts or a yard sale. There are a variety of different styles of display racks to use, depending on their price and the tools being displayed. Take advantage of displays provided by suppliers, when possible. Although cardboard displays are a money saver, they tend



Cross merchandising with color can get customers to stop and see all of your products.

to be flimsy and won't stand up to weather conditions. In a very short time, tearing will occur, leaving tools back on the ground. Plastic displays are often available and will last longer than the cardboard. However, if located outside, they should be weighted — on a windy day, they may tip over. Metal displays are the most durable for weather conditions and will last much longer than the previously listed displays.

Tools lying on the ground or bunched up on a shelf make it difficult for customers to pick up and try. Frustrated customers will give up trying to untangle the tools and leave the store. Customers are naturally drawn to the tools they see you using in the garden center; they want to use the same tools the professionals use. However, do not put your employees' used gardening tools on the rack for purchase. Used tools, priced as new, will not sell and will degrade the look of other merchandise on the display. Mark tools for store use and keep them out of the items for sale. Schedule some time during the course of a day for an employee to reorganize the displays. This will only take a couple of minutes but will have a great impact on customers.

Color merchandising your store is but one of many facets

it takes to operate a successful retail garden center. Cross merchandising with color can get customers to stop and see all of your products. Paying attention to the basics of housekeeping will provide a clean and pleasant shopping environment. Use of innovative and colorful displays

will make the shopping experience interesting and fun.

What's that? You found a pleasant, colorful, interesting, fun place to shop? Let's jump in my burnt-orange PT Cruiser and find a hose reel to match that berry garden hose I bought last week!

*Ron Greening is director of marketing and Western sales at Dramm. He can be reached at rgreening@dramm.com.*

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