

# More Than a Feeling

A little planning and research — and a healthy dose of inspiration — can add up to a successful, profitable display for upscale garden items.

BY CINDY CRAGG

**I**nspiration. It's the first stage of product development and often motivates the final sale. Find the right inspiration, and you'll create an upscale shopping experience that transports your retail guests to another place and time. For today's savvy customers, shopping is not just a means to an end — sometimes it's even an escape. Create that ideal oasis and loyal, happy customers will follow. Every retailer's challenge is to create an inspiring retail "destination" season after season. Sound overwhelming? Prepare to be inspired.

When it comes to displaying quality outdoor garden containers, taking cues from 18th-century gardeners has never been more relevant than it is today. For colonial Americans in Williamsburg, Va., gardening was not just a hobby — it was an art. As that trend comes full circle and gardeners take more pride in the aesthetics of their outdoor living spaces, the same should be true for your displays.

Creating a "destination" for your customers is important for more reasons than merely offering visual enjoyment. Customers want guidance. They want to know what to do with the things they buy. Your displays need to generate ideas and offer suggestions customers can recreate (or, in some cases, hire someone else to recreate). Accomplish this, and they will buy.

### Art Imitates Life

Start by finding your own real-life inspiration. Maybe it's your backyard, your local botanical garden, your family's beach

house — whatever helps you create a focal point. If you're passionate about your product assortment and the way it is displayed, that passion will translate to your customer. Once you've established your inspiration, let that vision dictate the colors and textures of the vignette. The more realistic you can make your display, the more likely it will sell.

I'm often amazed at how few people can visualize a space. Help your customer by filling in the gaps. Accessories are essential to making an environment realistic. Incorporate as many natural elements as you can afford, especially in a lush, upscale display. Artificial plant materials make acceptable backdrops, but items at the front of your store should be fresh. Invest in materials that can be reused from season to season in different ways to create different looks. Gravel, sand, boxwood, ivy...these items are versatile enough to bring back every season.



### A Little Legwork Goes a Long Way

Can't find the right inspiration? Let your merchandise (and the manufacturers) help you. Do some research into the inspiration and history behind the product, and let that dictate the direction when creating your display. Williamsburg's garden urns from Campania are a perfect example. These classic urns can be displayed in a variety of settings, but it's also easy to build on their natural connection to the rich history and inspiration of Colonial Williamsburg's gardens. Challenge yourself to transport your customer to a different place.

Or do something unexpected. While it's always good to give your customers "real life" examples of how they can incorporate the product into their own environs, we all know that it's the unexpected that gets noticed. High-end consumer shelter magazines are great for ideas. Chandeliers hanging from trees, mirrors hung on ivy walls, a patio floor lined with candles — these are all things that may not work in a private home but generate attention and interest in a retail setting. Juxtaposing two completely different vignettes featuring the same product gives your customers great ideas to use at home. It's often surprising how dramatic the results can be with just a few different accessories.

### Inspiration Is Contagious

Lastly, share your inspiration with your customers. Exploit your inspiration to help your customers visualize and dream. Use graphics that depict a place or image that help you create your theme. Many products are inspired by historical elements, elements in nature and decorative genres. At a recent market, a company's display had used framed pieces of fabric, the inspiration for a tabletop line, on the wall as art. It offered a nice visual reference but also gave some history to help build the product's story.

Whether in your wall art, accessories or vignette décor, use color for your inspiration palette as much as you can. Color can pull together items that are otherwise unrelated. It can easily change the mood of the space and always adds a little bit of drama. The bright hues that are popular right now are great when paired with the greens from the garden and the neutrals so often seen in outdoor containers.

Inspiration is not hard to come by. As you move through your daily life, take notice when you are attracted to a product. Is it the functionality of the item or is it the way it is displayed? More often, what initially catches the eye is the display. By recognizing what inspires you, you'll more easily inspire others, ultimately encouraging sales. Simply add your creativity and a little research to the amazing selection of upscale products on the market to create displays that will invite, engage and inspire. ▶

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Inspire your customers with vignettes that evoke the artistry of gardens of the past.

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