

Being Cart Smart

There are many uses for carts in the garden center, from helping consumers shop to increasing employee efficiency. Read on to learn more about carts and what they can do for your business.

By Meghan Boyer



Top: Carts can help increase employee efficiency by moving a lot of products at once. **Bottom:** Customers can carry (and buy) more products if you have carts available for their use.

Carts, whether they are for employee or customer use, can be a major business investment. Yet, the benefits they can bring to your garden center are well worth the cost and effort of outfitting your business. With a little consideration as to what works best for your garden center (do you want pneumatic or solid wheels?), you can find the right types of carts for your situation.

There are a lot of different carts available for garden center use, such as flat carts, tree dollies, wagons, retail carts, shipping carts and display carts. The right cart mix depends on your individual business needs. Likewise, the amount of carts required to adequately meet your staff and customer needs depends on store size and customer flow.

Increasing Efficiency

Carts are a simple solution when it comes to increasing employee efficiency. Picture an employee who needs to move a table of flats from one end of the garden center to another. If that employee loads the flats onto a cart, the project will move more quickly than if she carries each one by hand.

Mitchell Ellis, owner of Ellis Products, Semmes, Ala., has been in the cart business for 30 years and sees carts as great resources for employees. "In the retail business, it's location, location, location. If [plants] are not moving well in one spot, just one person can grab a cart and move them," he said.

This easy mobility means fewer employees can accomplish more work.

Making Shopping Easier

Employees aren't the only ones who benefit from garden center carts. Think about your customers and their shopping needs. For many customers, pushing a cart while shopping is more comfortable than carrying products around the store. Also, the added carrying capabilities of a cart can bring about increased sales for you.

Ellis sees the benefits of carts for customers as common sense: If customers don't have carts, they will stop shopping once they are unable to carry any more product. "If you go to the grocery store and you grab one of those little tote baskets and you put some beans in there, some corn, a loaf of bread and a gallon of milk, that's pretty heavy right there," he explained. "You'll need to give it a rest. If you have a cart that you can just load up, you're going to fill it up."

The idea is that a customer is going to shop until the cart is full, according to Ellis. He described a situation where he sold carts to a man who grew product for five different garden centers. Those garden centers had few if any carts available for customer use, and the owners were reluctant to invest in carts for themselves. So the grower, who believed in the benefits of carts, purchased carts and loaned them to the retailers, who saw dramatic increases in their sales the following spring.



Merchandising display

This indoor merchandising unit features an interlocking design so no hardware should be necessary. It is stained black with a glossy finish, and dimensions are 52 inches wide and 4 ft. high. Maine Bucket Company. (800) 231-7072. **Write in 1428**



Track signing system

These systems are intended to reduce sign clutter and can be trimmed to fit specific lengths. Tracks can be mounted with nails or small screws. They are made from PVC plastic, which is designed to be weather resistant. Available colors are black or dark green. Horticultural Marketing & Printing. (800) 433-8247. **Write in 1433** ▶



Carts make it easier for employees to help load customer purchases.

What About Wheels?

In addition to cart type, you need to decide on the best type of wheels for the terrain at your store. Carts are available with two basic wheel types: pneumatic and solid. Pneumatic wheels are filled with air while solid wheels are dense.

In a garden center with lots of obstacles such as dirt and gravel, many retailers feel pneumatic wheels are the better choice because they can bounce and roll over blockages. Though, there is a possibility of flat pneumatic tires if a wheel encounters something sharp. Solid tires do not have this problem, though small solid tires may lock up and slide over bumpy terrain.

Ellis believes wheel choice for garden centers isn't necessarily just about solid or pneumatic wheels; he feels wheel diameter is most important. As long as there is enough wheel diameter and width to cover surface area, solid wheels will be able to move over rough ground just as well as pneumatic ones, said Ellis.

aisles have an increased likelihood of being damaged than those that are stored safely.

Similarly, store carts properly in the off-season, preferably in a covered area, but don't store them under a plastic covering, said Ellis. "It condensates underneath plastic just like it does in the greenhouse. It can keep the carts wet, and if they're not galvanized, it can enhance rust," he explained.

If weathered-looking carts will not make you happy years down the road, painted carts are not for you. They will show weather damage more over time than those that are hot-dipped galvanized, according to Ellis. Galvanized carts have a rougher finish and less shine than painted ones, but they're going to remain largely the same even after exposure to the elements, explained Ellis. ✎


Meghan Boyer is associate editor of Lawn & Garden Retailer. She can be reached at mboyer@sgcmail.com or (847) 391-1013.

Keep Them Safe

Carts can last for a long time, but it is important to care for them properly. Be sure to corral customer carts when they are not in use. Carts left alone in parking lots or in garden center

LearnMore!

For more information related to this article, go to www.lgrrmag.com/lm.cfm/lg030706




**RUBBER MULCH AND GROUND COVER
FOR EVERY APPLICATION**



- **Playground Safety Tested**
Confirmed by independent testing
- **Local & Affordable Delivery**
Delivered right to your store, job site or yard
- **Competitively Priced**
Priced to be cost effective
- **Variety of Size Options**
Packed the way you want it – 20 lb. bags to bulk
- **Consistent Quality**
Manufactured to exacting standards
- **Reliable Supply Source**
Locally manufactured so it's always in stock

Call today for more information.

ADVANCED
GROUND CARE PRODUCTS
877-MULCH2U

665 W. Armory Drive • South Holland, IL 60473
Phone: 708-331-6100 • Fax: 708-331-6300
www.advancedgroundcare.com



Write in 758

Meet us at the

Beaches



Wish you were here!
My Coastal Blue DuraCord® Hammock



Best seat poolside or any cool locale.
My DuraCord® Quilted Hammock

Latest line from





A favorite spot on the porch!
My DuraCord® Beaches Single Swing

The HammockSource • P.O. Box 1602 • 305 Industrial Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27835 • 800-334-1078
www.thehammocksource.com

Write in 799