



## Catering to Container Gardeners

We all know container gardening is the craze right now, but what about the people who do it because they have to?

By Liz Huntington

**T**here's been a lot of talk lately about the popularity of pots but without enough recognition of the variety of people driving this trend. Many of them have little or no property, but what they lack in real estate is made up for in creativity. Garden centers are slow to cater to this group of customers, yet the opportunities for additional in-store traffic and repeat business come from these non-land owners. Understanding the different needs of these gardeners can help you tailor your sales toward them.

### Apartment/Condo Dwellers

This population is large and varied, but of those who decorate with plants, two basic groups are worth noting — the baby boomers who are downsizing, and the 20/30-somethings on the way up.

The baby boomers tend to have more time on their hands and don't want to give up gardening as a recreational activity. For this group, showcase a variety of containers and styles of planting. Don't just stick with terracotta, go for the whole world; Asian, Mexican, Mediterranean, you name it. Variety is the spice of life. This is a huge segment of the population, and they like to experiment. Also, in-store container classes are very popular with this demographic.

The younger group of container gardeners has less time and is highly mobile, so they want personality the convenient way. Pre-plant some pots for instant gratification or to stimulate ideas. You can even create "starter packs" of soil, fertilizer and three pots of varying size. Since this group is in constant movement, automatic watering mechanisms are also great.



### Vitality for the Unable

Growing things can be very empowering; it can often open up possibilities in a world that can seem detached. Recreational activities for the disabled and elderly are limited, which makes gardening all the more popular. A recent *Newsweek* article profiled the movement toward "Gardening Therapy" because of its effects on mood and quality of life. You can stimulate enthusiasm within this audience by reaching out to senior centers or encouraging gifts for Grandparents Day.

Senior centers have limited space, and the mobility issue is of special concern. Since bending and working on their knees is painful, encourage these customers to purchase containers they can easily reach, such as hanging baskets, wall baskets, standing baskets or cube planters. Also, be mindful of sharp edges. Round, plastic containers are perfect because they will not crack or break, and they do not have harsh edges in case someone should accidentally fall onto or over them.

### Urban Farmers

The culinary convenience of clipping rosemary or grabbing a quick tomato for fresh pasta sauce has created a whole new customer seeking the gourmet aspects of container farming. This type of gardening is especially attractive to beginners because herbs/vegetables are relatively easy to grow, vegetable gardening shows tangible results and the whole family can participate (read more about herbs on page 36). Success with parsley, basil, rosemary and oregano may lead to trials of string beans, zucchini and tomatoes. Be sure your store promotes this type of container gardening, with seed packets and starters next to window boxes and planters. You

Container gardening is an easy way to garden in a small space and cater to an older generation that can't garden as much anymore.

### Flower basin

This Eared Basin is 27 inches across and 8 inches deep. It is handmade of iron-rich clay and high fired. Anamese Garden and Home. (337) 734-3656. **Write in 1415**



### Planter collection

The Tuscany Collection of hanging baskets, window and deck planters, and wall planters is part of the Olympic Forge line. All containers come with AquaSav coco liners that may help retain water. Camelot, Cottage, Honeycomb and Lancaster collections are also available. Pride Garden Products. (866) 304-2626. **Write in 1425**



### Terrarium garden

Hand-blown glass and an aged terracotta base comprise this indoor terrarium garden. It comes in three sizes: 12, 15 and 18 inches. Campo de' Fiori. (413) 528-9180. **Write in 1417**

### Garden face

Mr. and Mrs. Bloom are made in America of weather-resistant resin and hand finished in different colors. Fiddlewood Studios. (770) 552-2515. **Write in 1426**



### Basket

The new Blacksmith wrought iron line is heavy duty and features a barley twist design. The Spanish Wall Basket and Spanish Hanging Basket are included in the line. Gardman USA, Inc. (770) 419-7343. **Write in 1418**



### Tin buckets

These galvanized tin buckets are hand-wrapped in fabric and have a water-resistant finish. There are nine different bucket styles to choose from. Themed fabrics such as tropical, romantic, shabby chic, kids and baby, amongst others, are available. Bread and Budder. (706) 207-5758. **Write in 1424** ♦

may even want to plant up an ornamental herb garden for a window box or place urns overflowing with tomatoes next to container boxes of zucchini. What you are trying to do is get your customers to think, "I could do that!"

### Local Businesses

Have you considered the many area businesses with entryways and windows? Since the entrance is the focal point, retail businesses with a potted garden at their doors are very attractive to sidewalk traffic and might invite more people to walk through the door.

The myriad of people working in cubes in large office buildings is also a prime target. Potted plants can be a nice employee gift that adds a lot of personality to an otherwise gray landscape. More and more office professionals are recognizing the positive psychological benefits plants have for employees.

### Visual Merchandising

You are not in the supply business; you are in the beauty business! What does your entrance look like? Do you have racks of sale items and end-of-summer BBQs greeting your customers? The main entrance should be the first place you showcase your container know-how, with a distinctive display that is both inviting and demonstrative of your expertise.

## Success Stories

In the San Francisco Bay Area, two retailers have made it their mottoes to feed the container craze. Bayside Garden Center, Tiburon, Calif., sees a number of younger, active apartment/condominium dwellers. According to owner Matt Donlan, Bayside's success lies in superior service for these busy people. The store displays up to two dozen pre-planted pots, offers classes in-store and at the local library, and will even go to your apartment to install. "If you build 'em, they'll buy 'em" he assures us.

In an older neighborhood nearby, West End Nursery, San Rafael, Calif., literally changed its whole business due to the aging boomers living in the area. Established in 1909, the company's motto is "96 and still growing" — largely due to the popularity of pots. "We used to be about 99 percent plant sales," explains owner Tom Untermann, "but pots became so big, we've evolved into 45 percent plant sales and 55 percent containers and extras." The store now boasts 10,000 sq.ft. of pottery, fountains and other accents. It does not pre-plant pots, however, because older customers want to take the time to create and customize. The success of both of these stores lies in their understanding the needs of their customers.

Designate an area of your store for container planting, and place the required supplies close at hand. Plant up some of your pots, and post some easy "how to" signage to aid in shopping. Some growers will even provide printed guides for you, just ask.

As much as possible, make the inside of your store a visual pleasure — less of a shopping trip and more of an experience. With your flair, you can inspire ideas and create add-on sales. In fact, customers will have good reason to come back to see what else you've dished up. You'll also get talked about, which is free PR.

No matter where your store is located, there is always a container customer. This group is growing, so it pays to pay attention to them. 🌿

*Liz Huntington is a freelance writer based in San Rafael, Calif. She can be reached by phone at (415) 458-2432 or E-mail at e.huntington@comcast.net.*

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