

MERCHANDISING

CUSTOM WREATHS:

CIRCULAR SATISFACTION

This holiday season, create an endless loop of customer loyalty with custom-made wreaths.

By Hannah Kiefer

Awreath, in its simplest form, is a ring of evergreen to hang on a door during the holidays. But a custom wreath? Think pinecone clusters, ribbons in every color, maybe even peacock feathers — something more special. Custom-made means customer-focused, which can also sometimes mean unconventional.

Customer requests for these tailor-made decorations are “all over the board” at

Kale’s Christmas Shop, Princeton, N.J. “Last year, I did

a wreath that had peacock feathers with a

teal bow and gold trim, and I spray

painting it with gold glitter,” says

garden center manager Kevin

Bullard. “We’ll get the traditional

red bow with pinecones, too.” And wreath

sizes can range anywhere from

eight inches to six feet, Bullard adds.

But wreath designers can be

equally creative. Susan Geiser,

senior floral designer at

Wight’s Lawn & Garden, Lyn-

wood, Wash., says they first

make wreaths to match the 35

themed trees displayed in their store.

Customers can then choose from a

variety of options if they don’t have

ideas of their own. Themes range from nativity to vintage to sports.

Back to Basics

In most regions, “real, quality Christmas wreaths” are healthy, fresh-cut evergreens. However, in Arizona, where winter temperatures still reach into the 80s, that kind of wreath dries out fast and can be a potential fire hazard.

Instead, Eric Clark, horticulturalist at Civano Nursery in Tucson, says his workers use what’s local and realistic — and that’s true quality. From cactus pads to eucalyptus leaves and magnolias, customers get what will last and look more natural in their climate and habitat.

And when wreath business is booming, efficient production is essential to maintaining workers’ sanity, especially when add-ons can range from citrus fruits to gumdrop candies.

Waterloo Gardens, with three locations near Philadelphia, arranged a set up to accomplish exactly that. Certain areas in the store are

dedicated solely to wreath making, with all the necessary materials an arm’s length away. “[Employees] don’t

have to search the store for materials every day,” says

Heather Carlson, nursery director. “We can crank

stuff out but really provide a quality product.”

Keep Service in Mind

Great service, like helping a customer even when it could be seen as a hassle, is paramount at

Christmas, especially where special wreaths that could make or break a home’s holiday decor are

concerned. Dana Althoff, manager and grower at Parkview Nursery, Aberdeen, S.D., says they

prefer 24 hours notice for orders.

“But sometimes someone comes in and wants a wreath in an hour and a half, so we’ll do that

just to please the customer,” she said. An occasional favor or proving that you can go above and

beyond for your customers can evolve into regular, well-known services that generate extra

revenue. “We install decorations in people’s homes when they’re too busy during the holidays,” says

Paul Witry, general manager at Sid’s Greenhouse, Palos Hills, Ill.

Mix in Tradition

Whether you have 70 customers at a wreath-making seminar or just 10 at a demonstration

session, classes do more than bring your customers into your store to sell, educate and build

relationships. They can entertain, make memories and even establish traditions.

At Frontier Land Care, owner SuEllyn Reinke says wreath-making classes have grown to be

more than basic instructional sessions. They add cider, coffee and Christmas goodies for a more

festive atmosphere. “Some people bring wine, and they’ll make it their girls night out,” she adds. “It’s

gotten really fun. We have a lot of repeat people that do it every year.”

Randy Ortega Junior, manager at Nick’s Garden Center and Farm Market, Aurora, Colo., says their



A dedicated area for creating wreaths like this one at Waterloo Gardens can help improve productivity and product quality.

open house features live jazz, hors-d’oeuvres and champagne. There’s no better time to show off the wreaths than when people are in the mood and enjoying the atmosphere, and Nick’s usually has about 200 on display.

More Than a Sale

Custom-made wreaths can be an essential part of the garden center business during the holidays. But peacock feathers, quick turnaround and spiced cider aside, personalization opens up a window for holiday sentimentality, which means happy customers who want to return. And sometimes the emotional impact is even greater.

“One woman’s husband was dying of cancer, and he was a big John Deere collector,” says SuEllyn Reinke, owner of Frontier Land Care, Ainsworth, Neb. “So she brought in toys she’d bought, and we custom made that wreath for her.”

Frontier Land Care and other garden centers see their wreath-buying customers year after year. But on top of the quality products and service these stores provide, wreath-making during the holidays provides much more than the typical “thanks for coming; have a nice day” customer experience: It’s another way to make memories. 🌿

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