



Creative Easter Displays Get Sales Hopping

Turning greenhouse space into a nice Easter display takes a lot of creative and hard work. Take a look at how Platt Hill Nursery was able to pull it off.

By Liz Huntington

A gray January day in Chicago seems a long way from the bustling energy of April, where hope for increased sales springs anew. It's a slow time for imagination and enthusiasm when the cash registers are fast asleep with the winter chill. That's the way it was for the folks at Platt Hill Nursery, until an early visit from the Easter Bunny hatched a creative plot for more profits.

THE SCENARIO

Platt Hill Nursery's Carpentersville, Ill., location (the other store is in Bloomingdale, Ill.) serves as the main plant production area for nursery stock and mums. This location is one big greenhouse with no designated retail area like most garden centers have. This year, the staff at Platt Hill wanted to create new sales, see new faces and stir things up with accents for indoor, as well as outdoor, décor but found themselves limited by their lack of dry goods retail space.

They began by thinking beyond the box — in this case a 6,000-sq.ft. rectangle — to explore possibilities. Instead of looking at obstacles, they engaged their imaginations with questions like “Under what conditions could we have a retail area? How could we sell dry goods? What's stopping us?” Basically, the conclusion they arrived at was that even though they were a greenhouse, they didn't have to act like one. If they could somehow create a retail focus area, they could

offer customers more gifty décor items, and Platt Hill could pick up sales for products other than those requiring warmth and water. Spring was somewhere around the corner (hard to imagine just yet), and they knew nothing could resurrect in-store traffic better than Easter. And then it hit them...

The big idea? A freestanding Easter boutique hatched right in the greenhouse, with four retail “rooms” to peruse. Are you scratching your head? Read on!

SETTING THE STAGE

As a 360-degree visual feast, Platt Hill staged a set that would even catch the eye of Broadway. Imagine a very large “X” — a 16x16-foot footprint, and 8 feet tall to boot. Each opening was transformed into the corner of a “room,” with each room having a unique twist on indoor/outdoor décor.

First, they separated their wet zones from their dry zones (after all, they are a greenhouse). Center stage in the dry zone, they set to work with 2x4s, drywall, old pieces of barn and even some old decking a customer was tossing out. They painted, built shelving, brought in old tables, and created a store with no windows, walls or doors.

“We like to have fun,” said general manager Shirlee Stanchina. “During January, when the registers weren't ringing, our gals would paint and decorate.” The group effort gave the staff a common goal of fun and creativity and offered a breath of fresh air to the usual set of responsibilities. With a little color here and a

Platt Hill Nursery, Carpentersville, Ill., was able to take a small space in a large greenhouse and turn it into an Easter extravaganza.



few décor accents there, before they knew it their X definitely marked the spot. Suddenly, where there were once endless rows of plants and flowers, they now had arbors, baskets, planters, gifts, statuary, birdhouses and wreaths to sell.

There was some method to the madness as well. They specifically painted backdrops and walls in neutral colors so they could switch out plants and gift items according to color. They also drove customers into the wet zone by tying in colors of home accents to the colors of the plants nearby. The result was very effective: Home décor customers saw how they could tie-in their garden with their house for a more thorough celebration of spring. Color elements mingled between both wet and dry zones so that the customer shopped the whole greenhouse.

THE PAYOFF

“We sold through 90 percent of the décor — mostly wreaths and birdhouses,” Stanchina said with a smile. “It’s been an incredible spring for us!” In spite of the nursery’s “whole-sale look” on the outside, people were in for a surprise. Is it a boutique posing as a greenhouse or a greenhouse exploring its inner boutique? An influx of new customers showed up to find out, and gave their approval at the cash register.

Now, any new and different plan is not without its mishaps. When asked if they would do anything differently next time, Stanchina piped in that indeed there were some opportunities for better planning. While the display took front and center, planning for shopping cart movement did not. “We erred on the side of the quaint, boutique look and didn’t totally take into account how customers were going to maneuver around it,” admits Stanchina.

If there were anything they would caution other creative, energetic souls it would be to plan for more aisle space and functionality.

On a more positive note, however, Stanchina’s advice to others is to have fun and explore ideas: “Try not to see your limitations, and always try new things.” Looking beyond winter and beyond the walls of the greenhouse evolved into a completely new approach to retail. With these thoughts of optimism and imagination, a message of profitability is hopping your way.

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