



Garden Center Chic

Help cultivate a passion for fashion in garden center customers by carrying apparel that represents the hobby they love.

By Meghan Boyer

You already know that any time you can bring people into your store it means more money, but have you thought about using more than plants and fertilizer as bait? Many garden centers now carry home décor and gift items as a regular part of their offering. What about other items? What about products that are not usually considered garden products...things like pet supplies and gourmet food? These kinds of ancillary categories are proving profitable for garden centers around the country.

"Developing Markets," a monthly series that will appear in each issue of Lawn & Garden Retailer, will profile eight of these potential new markets, giving insight into the health of the market, relating how other garden centers have mastered the category and profiling some of the best new products in the category.

January: Fashion Accessories
February: Cause Merchandise
March: Candles
April: Children's Department
June: Apparel
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November: Home Accessories

Many Americans are enamored with clothes and the fashion industry. Mass retailers help increase this interest by frequently updating their apparel lines, often several times within a season, and top clothing makers hold runway shows throughout the world to premiere their lines. Magazines like *Vogue* and *Lucky* showcase new fashions and television shows like TLC's "What Not To Wear" and Bravo's "Project Runway" teach viewers what is popular and how to wear it. In short, the apparel industry consists of a fast-paced ebb and flow of trends and merchandise fueled by media exposure.

For those who like to focus on different types of plants — and not different types of pants — the apparel industry can be intimidating. Yet, carrying apparel in your store doesn't mean you have to be well versed in haute couture. It's simply a matter of taking what you already know — gardening and gardeners — and applying it to a different market.

A Booming Market

The apparel market is strong and getting stronger. In 2005, it posted growth for the second year in a row, despite a slow overall economy. The NPD Group, a consumer and retail information company, reported that total U.S. apparel sales reached

\$181 billion in 2005 — a 4-percent increase over 2004. Men's apparel sales reached nearly \$53 billion, stated The NPD Group, a 5-percent increase from 2004. Women, your main clients, drove apparel sales to \$101 billion in 2005, a 3-percent increase from 2004. Among the popular items that helped the growth were t-shirts, jeans, tailored clothing and pajamas.

A diverse set of apparel venues also helps raise overall sales. In fact, selling clothing in non-traditional venues such as garden centers is a trend happening at small, independent businesses and nationwide chains alike. Recently, Virgin Entertainment Group Inc.



Rotate your apparel stock and update displays to stay current; try merchandising light colors like purple and pink in the spring and summer.



Basic apparel items like sun hats, gloves and garden shoes make gardening easier for customers.

decided to start including apparel items at its 17 Virgin Megastores, according to *Apparel News*. The stores are best known for selling CDs, DVDs and video games; now they sell t-shirts, track jackets, blazers and denim. At Virgin's New York, N.Y., and Hollywood, Calif., locations, apparel and accessory products now consume 35 percent of the floor space. The retailer's choice to add apparel stems from decreased sales due to online music shopping.

Incorporate Trends

Garden centers carry plants, tools and soil — everything a person would need to garden — so why not apparel? Just as your consumers use a certain set of tools and equipment in the garden, they also use certain clothes, which means you don't need to be on the cutting edge of fashion to find items garden center shoppers will like. The basics like sun hats, gloves and garden shoes make gardening easier and additional apparel such as garden-themed shirts make it fun.

The key is not to imagine your store competing with large-scale apparel retailers or even small boutiques. Instead stick to items with a garden theme — from flowered socks to shorts embroidered with watering cans. That way you can cater to the hobby your customers' love and become the go-to store for garden enthusiasts in need of gifts or new clothes for themselves.

To stay current, choose garden center-related clothing for your store based on apparel industry trends. Andrew Ash, retail editor for *Apparel News*, sees a few apparel trends on

the horizon: "I've interviewed a lot of retail consultants that say the new looks and colors that are going to be popular for the upcoming year are emerald green and off-white. Other retail consultants say that goth [style] is going to become popular again." Selling items in emerald or off-white colors or carrying deep, saturated colors to capitalize on the potential goth trend will keep your apparel stock up to date.

You can uncover trends by reading fashion magazines and watching television programming to see the popular styles celebrities are wearing or try walking through a mall and taking note of what the mannequins and shoppers are wearing. The more times a look is repeated, the more likely it is to be a current trend. You will probably be able to find garden-related apparel merchandise to match those trends.

If trend spotting isn't for you, Ash feels that carrying basic, classic items will never go out of style. He cites quality jeans, t-shirts and sweaters as the basics that an apparel store can survive with. Try focusing on these items — but with a garden spin.

A Boutique Feel

You shouldn't merchandise apparel items like you would fertilizer or garden tools; try giving the section a boutique feel, which will help it stand out. Creatively fold shirts on tables and shelves: You can fold them in half vertically or horizontally and stack them according to size. Another option is to make a folding board by cutting a rectangle out of stiff cardboard to fold shirts around. Once stacked, this will give the tops a tidy, uniform appearance. ▀

Tom Boschma is guestware and garden accessories holiday import buyer for Armstrong Garden Centers, based in Glendora, Calif. The company has multiple locations throughout California. He recently spoke with *Lawn & Garden Retailer* about the types of apparel carried in Armstrong Garden Center stores.

How long have you been stocking apparel?

At least 10 years.

What made you decide to add apparel?

It's a natural [product to add]. If people are coming into a garden center to buy plants and flowers, necessarily they would think of proper apparel for gardening as well. It's just sort of a natural thing to move into.

How much space do you devote to it?

I would say, on the average, about 50 sq.ft.

What kind of apparel merchandise do you sell?

We stock gloves, hats and gardening clogs. The Carlsbad [location] carries t-shirts, sweatshirts and the like, but Carlsbad is a tourist store location [for The Flower Fields].

What is your philosophy in choosing the products?

They've got to be actually garden related — UV resistant, durable and washable. Absolutely at the top of that list, they need to be attractive. People buy them to match their outfits. We've got assorted fashion colors of everything — all of it, hats and gloves and everything.

What products sell best?

It would be all of the above. We sell them all very well. I can't say one is better than the other. In dollars, I would say probably gloves, followed by hats and then clogs.

What kind of margin do you get?

We need about a 55 [percent].

Who is responsible for product selection and helping customers?

That would be myself, and our associates, of course, are trained to assist with this. We don't want to hire just what I call "plant brains." They need to have a little more than that. They need to be able to sell. That's very important.

Does this category bring people into the store more often or when they wouldn't otherwise be there?

I really think that it does, especially with the hats. We use San Diego Hat Company, and they do exceptionally well. ☺



Armstrong Garden Centers sell t-shirts and sweatshirts at their Carlsbad, Calif., location.

DEVELOPING MARKETS

Incorporating other garden products in the displays is a great way to cross merchandise; for instance, hats can be displayed on colorful, upside-down containers. You can get more merchandising ideas (in addition to trend ideas) by walking through a

local mall — many of the tactics large apparel retailers use, such as displaying items in outfits or by color categories, can work in garden centers and cost little or no money.

Further maintain a boutique feel by rotating your inventory. Clothing

lines generally change with the season: Rotate your apparel stock and update displays to stay current. Feature dark or muted tones for fall and winter and bright colors and patterns for spring and summer. Assign an employee with retail cloth-

ing experience to help merchandise, maintain and sell the section. ✂

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Organizations:

American Apparel and Footwear Association
www.apparelandfootwear.org

Children's Apparel Manufacturers' Association
www.cama-apparel.org

Magazines:

Apparel Magazine
www.apparelmag.com

Apparel News
www.apparelnews.net

Web Sites:

Apparel Search
www.apparelsearch.com



1. Dress and duster

This dress and duster is a 3-piece set. The tank dress has hidden seam pockets. The long-sleeved jacket features a woven stripe detail and patch pockets in front. The outfit gradates from light to dark purple. Red Hat Society Store. (866) 386-2850. **Write in 1425**

2. Gloves

Cool Touch 260 gloves are designed to be breathable with a knit back and polyurethane coating on the palm and fingertips. Gloves are available in S, M, L and XL sizes. Atlas Glove Consumer Products, a division of LFS Inc. (800) 426-8860. **Write in 1418**

3. Chambray shirt

These 100-percent cotton, pre-shrunk chambray shirts feature roll-up sleeves, straight hems with side vents and an airomesh-lined cape vent in the back. Available sizes from XS to XL. Shirts weigh 4 oz. per sq.yd. and are finished with an anti-insect shield and UV protection. Mumz Garden Apparel and Accessories. (800) 995-MUMZ. **Write in 1424**

4. Gauntlet glove

This paisley gauntlet glove is made of cotton sateen on the back of the hand and pigskin on the palm. The cuff can be tightened with a stretchy pull cord. Available women's sizes are S, M and L. Womanswork. (800) 639-2709. **Write in 1422**



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5. Footwear

GardenGrips footwear is designed for mowing, landscaping and other lawn and garden work. Performance features include patented Grip-N-Go outsoles, rounded cleats on a butyl rubber sole, a rubber overtoe and a composite shank. The footwear also features waterproof construction of treated, full-grain leather and double-stitched, sealed seams. LawnGrips. (877) 4GRIPS1. **Write in 1420**



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6. Drawstring tote

Made of braided nylon with faux leather trim and handles, these totes feature one pocket with a snap closure and an inner liner that can be pulled up and closed with a drawstring. The totes come in 20x10-inch, light brown and 15x11-inch, dark brown sizes. Sloggers. (877) 750-4437. **Write in 1421**



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7. Rose glove

This rose glove has an extended gauntlet for additional protection and is made from washable goatskin leather and tough-ex material. It was designed by an orthopedic hand surgeon and carries Ease-of-Use Arthritis Foundation approval. Bionic Gloves. (877) 5-BIONIC. **Write in 1419**



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8. Garden hat

This hat is available in five colors (black, hot pink, natural, orange and red) and two brim sizes (4 and 5 inch). All garden hats feature wide brims, sweat bands and chin cords. San Diego Hat Company. (888) 868-0588. **Write in 1426**



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9. Suede gloves

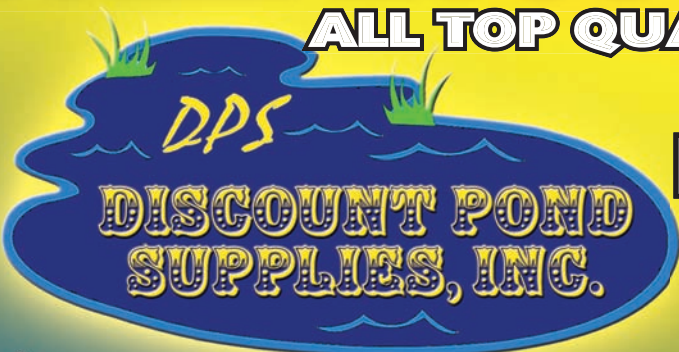
These women's gloves have a suede cowhide leather palm and a solid cotton canvas back. They feature a leather index finger, fingertips and knuckle strap and a gathered elastic back. The gloves are designed to be washable. Midwest Quality Gloves, Inc. (800) 821-3028. **Write in 1423**

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