

MERCHANDISING

Make a **Big Splash** in No Time

Great merchandising doesn't mean reinventing the wheel every time you have a new product. With just a few solid pieces to act as a backbone for your displays, you can have movable, creative merchandising in minutes — which is often all you have.

By Tina Bemis



I'm a retail grower. And I hate to admit this, but after months of planning a crop, growing it, designing workshops around it, advertising it, tweeting about it and writing about it on Facebook, sometimes I am simply out of steam when it comes time to merchandising it. A fellow retailer once told me that sometimes, during the busy season, all we have time to do is to put plants on a bench and smile.

In a perfect world we would all have plan-o-grams — made a year in advance — of what merchandise will go where, and with what tie-ins and add-ons. In reality, someone casually mentions, "Oh yeah, we are expecting a truckload of widgets sometime today. Find some room for them and make a display." And that was the essence of the merchandising competition I participated in at the OFA Short Course in July 2009. It challenged participants to ask themselves, "What could you do with only 45 minutes to create a display?" Through the years, I have devised a few systems that help me set up inspirational displays without a lot of



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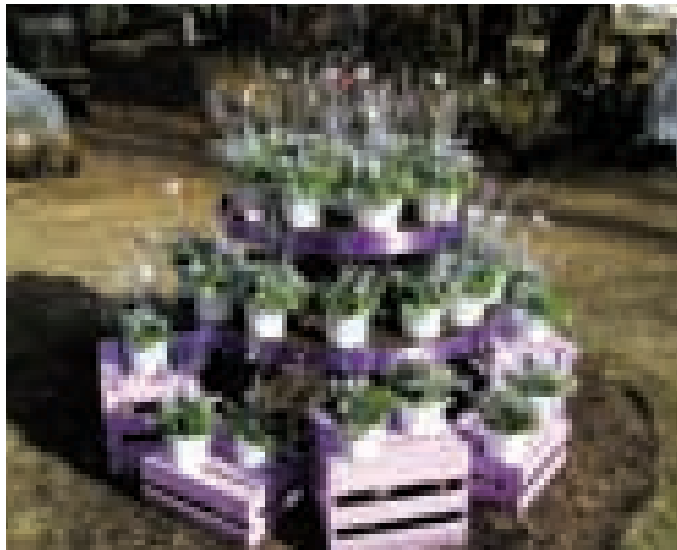


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Create a three-dimensional display that's shoppable from all angles. You can paint bulb crates to coordinate with seasonal hues and catch customers' eye with a fresh look.

time. My favorite displays take me 20 minutes or less to create. Most of my displays are not supposed to be "flower show" quality, although I may have a few of those scattered around to show off the design skills of our staff to promote our landscape design department. They are made to be emptied by customers — and easily restocked by *anyone* on my staff.

Just Do It

My first boss out of college, Bob McGoldrick of The Green Thumb in Westborough, Mass., often used the phrase, "Don't make a production out of it." His point was that, for small tasks, you shouldn't spend so long organizing and thinking about it that you could have just done it in the time it took to obsess over it.

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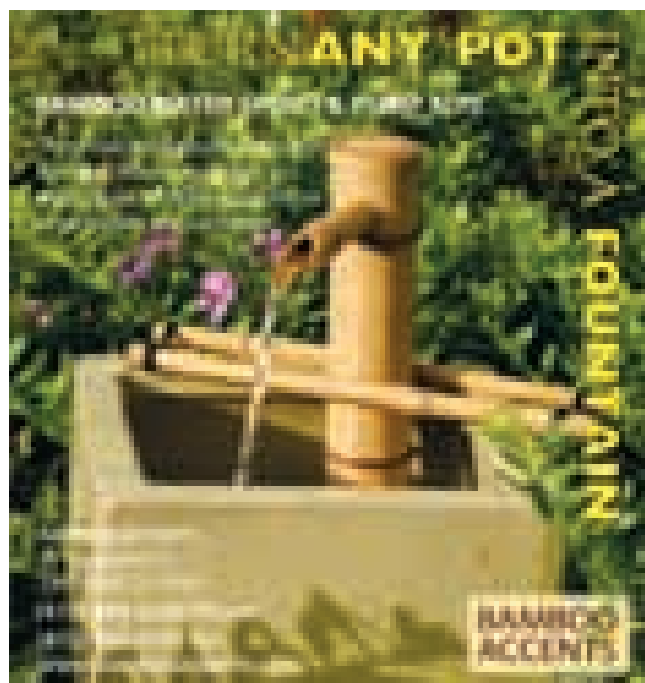
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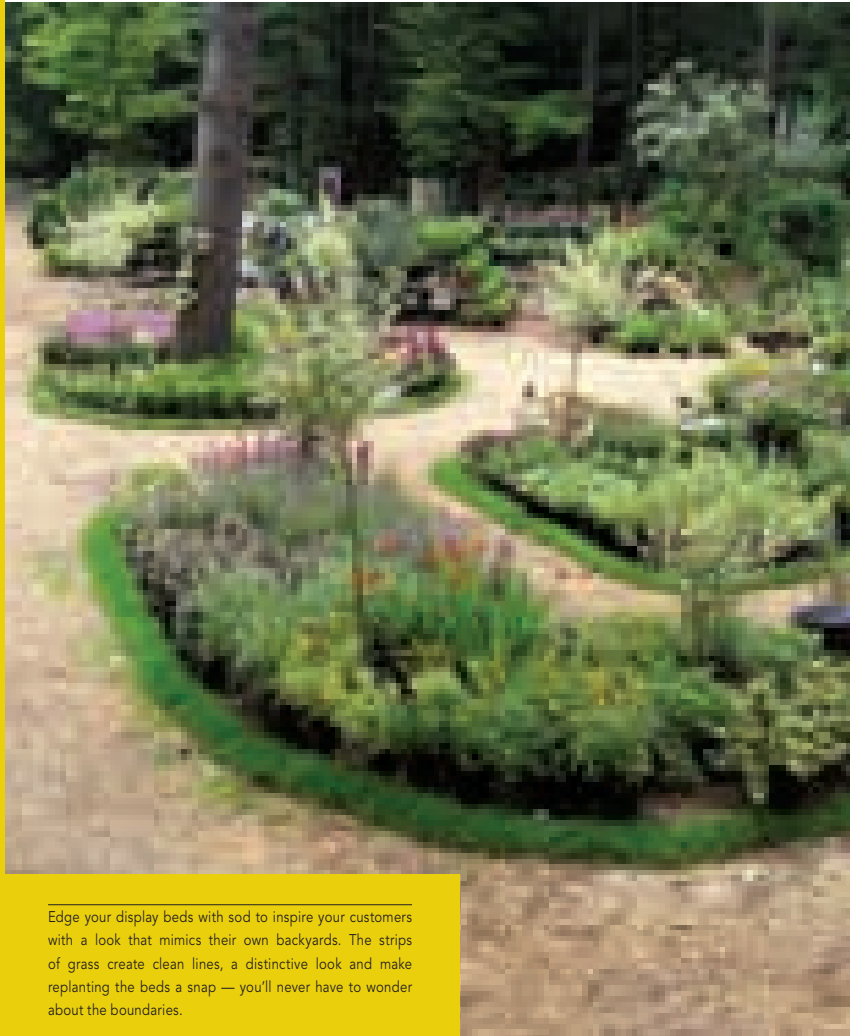
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She Has Good Bones

For me, the easiest way to do that is not to reinvent the wheel every time I need to make a display. I've created some "bones" that I can reuse many times each year. My favorite: painted wooden bulb crates. I joke with my bulb supplier that I love the crates more than the bulbs! We have about 50 of them, and once they get an initial, time-consuming coat of paint with a brush, they can be freshened every month or two with a quick coat of spray paint. (Maybe that's why I'm so crazy... I've breathed in a lot of fumes over the years.)

Making a three-dimensional display shows off more flowers per square foot, because the flowers on the sides of the plant are now in view, instead of hidden by the plant next to it. Add some waterproof ribbon, and in about 10 minutes, not only does your store look different from everyone else's, but the perceived value of the plants also increases, so you may be able to charge more for them.

These bulb boxes and ribbon can also add a lot of color at a time when there's not much in bloom. Easter 2008 was so early that the



Window box displays are interchangeable by the season or the whims of staff. New flowers go in and the displays change to match.

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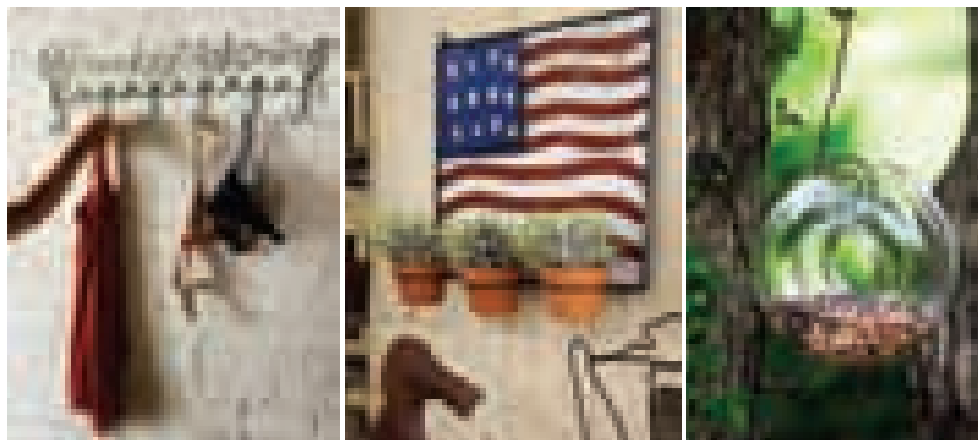
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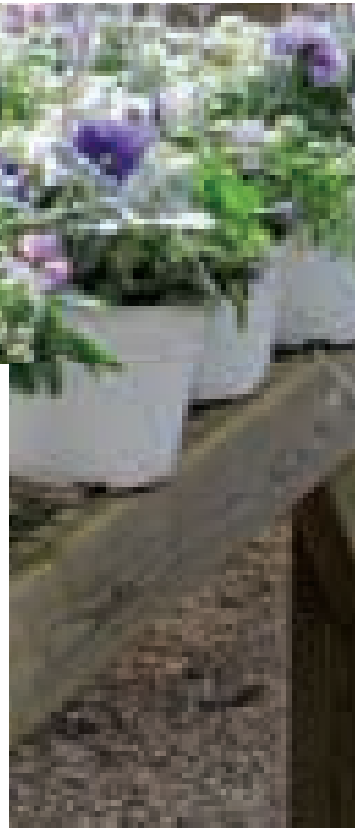
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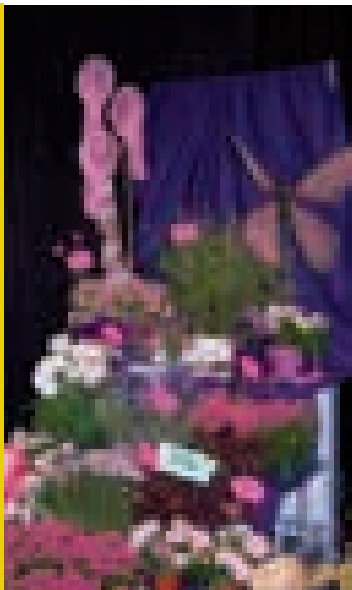


greenhouses weren't even full of annuals yet. Spray paint, ribbon and colorful watering cans helped make it look fuller.

Another favorite set of "bones" I have is my windows. We made three of them four years ago, and since then, they've each hosted dozens of displays. These are no-brainers to create 20-minute displays. We just follow our "thriller, chiller, filler, spiller" system to design the window box, and put those same plants beneath the window for easy shopping. Depending on how much inventory we have, we can keep building the display outward, with complementary plants. So in some cases, one small fixture can help create up to 100 square feet of display.

We built two of these facades last fall to promote our "buy five, get one free" mum promotion. The shrubs are planted pot-in-pot style, so the





Tina Bemis' 45-minute butterfly garden display took her to the Merchandising Showdown finals at the 2009 OFA Short Course.

whole display can be disassembled in about five minutes and redone in about 20 minutes. After we created the display, we added a sign that said, "Look how just six mums can transition your home from summer fashion to fall fashion." And hundreds of yellow mums were positioned just a few feet away.

Make Your Bed Every Day

For those of us who are still dreaming of paved walkways, here's another cheap trick I learned from my father-in-law, Richard. Cut a strip of sod in half lengthwise to create an inexpensive edge to a bed. This display style mimics a bed your customer might have at their home in the middle of their lawn, keeps plants from creeping out into the aisle and is in place when it's time to remake

When Easter fell too early for annuals to be in full bloom, Bemis Farms dressed up its skinny plant offerings with multicolored bulb crates, bright ribbon and matching watering cans.



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the bed without having to rethink the boundaries. These last about two years for us before they need to be redone.

Don't be overwhelmed. If you plan to create just one new set of fixtures every year, in five years you will have five sets of displays that can be done in minutes.

Tina Bemis is co-owner of Bemis Farms Nursery in Spencer, Mass., and was Lawn & Garden Retailer's contestant in the Merchandising Showdown at the 2009 OFA Short Course in Columbus, Ohio. She can be reached at tbemis@bemisfarmsnursery.com. For more information on Bemis Farms Nursery, visit www.bemisfarmsnursery.com.



Tina Bemis stands by her 45-minute merchandising miracle at the 2009 OFA Short Course in Columbus, Ohio. The theme was "plants that soak up the sun."

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