

SO MANY CHEMICALS, SO LITTLE ROOM

With so many chemicals out there and limited space in garden centers, finding a way to display this category is more challenging than ever before.



By Catherine Evans



Top: Chalet Nursery and Garden Shop in Wilmette, Ill., shows a unique display with a chemical "pharmacist" work station giving the customer a feel that someone is available to help with their chemical needs; Bottom: Alsip Home and Nursery Super Store in Frankfort, Ill., displays their chemicals according to the brand name, allowing the customer to easily locate names they recognize.

Insecticides, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides... there are so many different chemicals out there, how do you choose which to stock? Because of the amount of garden chemicals, it is very challenging for garden centers to accommodate all of the different types. Garden centers have been trying to come up with solutions on how to display their chemicals without taking up half the space in their stores.

Most garden centers do not have a lot of room to make chemical displays large enough to include all gardening chemicals. Some use gondola displays while others just use plain shelving units. Some sizes range from 12-40 feet, depending on the amount of product and space that store has. Each garden center takes a different approach. Some use the section as a plant pharmacy while others use a staple section along with tools and other basic gardening needs.

Even though these sections are displayed in different ways, the problem still remains that most stores only have a small amount of space in which to display dozens of chemicals. The standing question remains, "How do I fit all of those chemicals in such a small space?"

USING THE MEDIA TO GET AHEAD

Many garden centers are relying on the media to help them choose which chemicals to display. "There is a local gardening show that has gone syndicated that we use a lot of the time," said Bob Powers, Wilson Farms Garden Center, Lexington, Mass.

"When noon Sunday hits, we know what has been talked about on the show that morning because everyone comes in looking for it. We also use a lot of periodicals to find out which chemicals to use. This year, for instance, we will not be carrying certain chemicals because the EPA and FDA have reported some carcinogenic. The customer is aware of this so they are staying away from those products." Keeping up with new studies helps ensure certain chemicals are still safe and helps you anticipate possible government restrictions.

A Proper Garden in Delaware, Ohio, has a similar method. It carries two products that can potentially take care of one problem. One of the products is a typical chemical and the other is environmentally friendly. Because many customers are worried about their well-being, it's important to offer the option to use something less damaging.

Newsletters from various universities, industry magazines, television and radio can help you determine which chemicals are last to carry. Mike Berns from Berns Garden Center in Middletown, Ohio, said, "We use a lot of the information that comes out of Ohio State to learn about local insect problems and what the solutions are." Utilizing universities and extension services can be a tool in finding out which insects and diseases are on the rise, giving chemical buyers the upper hand.

THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT

Another way garden centers are figuring out what to buy is by what their sales teams



Chalet Nursery and Garden Shop's Garden Pharmacy is easily recognizable and gives chemicals a distinct location.

observe. "What we are doing is polling salespeople to look at what kinds of problems people have had in the past. We are looking at trends, the extension service and educational events, where we hear about trends in insects and diseases," said Bob Van Cura, A Proper Garden. There are a number of salespeople on the floors that are talking to customers everyday and getting feedback on which chemicals work for them and which do not. People want a solution to a problem and they go into garden centers looking for


that solution, and the sales teams are the ones to fix it. The customer is always right — if the customer won't buy it, then the product won't sell.

Berns Garden Center takes a traditional and easy approach with its chemical choosing. "We are trying to keep things simple and uncluttered," said Berns. "You can buy a chemical in 10 different containers to kill 10 different insects. We just buy one container of that chemical that takes care of all 10 of those insects."

Talking to the customer on a one-on-one basis can really help them learn about the product and adds that extra personal touch that customers really respond to. "We rely on our staff to sell the product to the customer," continued Berns. "The customer comes in with a problem, we take them into the chemical section, take the product off the shelf, and explain how it will take care of the problem. Just doing that really compacts the amount of product we have."

Powers adds, "People are a little leery about what they want; they certainly want to solve the problem, and that is where the chemicals come in. I tell people sometimes you have to fight fire with fire — if there is only one type of chemical that takes care of it you either take care of it or live with it."

The customer will not only respond to good service but to name recognition as well. A Proper Garden only works with name recognition when it comes to its chemicals. Van Cura said, "We are different than a number of garden centers because we tend to lean more towards the well-known brand names rather than some of the more independent brands. The reason for that is we feel that if customers are more familiar with a brand product they can find here, where they come for advice, most of the time they will leave here with what they need. The fact that they have seen it in other places just gives it that much more credibility and makes it an easier sell."

Chemical displays are very hard items to work with. Since there are so many out there in the market, it is tough to choose which ones to display, how many, which sizes, etc. That is just the selection process. Displaying them is more of a "less is more" theory: The more choices there are, the harder it is to determine the correct one to buy. Having a small area might be a little tough to work with, but choosing the right product will make work a little easier — both for you and your customers. 

Catherine Evans is associate editor of Lawn & Garden Retailer.

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