

# PLANT PROFIT IN AN INSTANT

You've got ready-made promotions in both new and award-winning varieties. All you have to do to get them off your displays is use your resources to make them vis-

**By Susan Ward**



I've never been a person big on change. I find something that works for me and stick to it. This same philosophy goes for my yard. I was telling a salesperson at my local garden center about my recent change of landscaping plans, and they directed me to some All-American Selections (AAS) winners. The salesperson gave me a brief overview of the program, and from there I was hooked. I knew they would be strong-performing plants, an excellent substitute for my usual annuals.

## PROMOTING AWARDS

I could not believe how little I knew of this program and was even more amazed that there are more like it out there. I began by hitting the Internet for information. Through my research I found out that it is a non-profit award given to those new varieties that have been proven to grow the best and be a garden success.

Of course my brain started turning and my first thought was my brother Jacob's garden center. Why aren't garden centers promoting these award winners more? I am an obvious example of a typical gardener being persuaded to buy plants because of an award attached to it. I could have easily walked in and out of the garden center without any purchases but ended up spending more than I had anticipated. Obviously my spending explosion would never have happened had it not been for that salesperson. Unfortunately, a garden center cannot have a salesperson following each customer around telling them about award-winning plants. Jacob and I sat around discussing the issue. He had more information about these award winners than I did and said he had considered promoting them before. His biggest problem was not knowing how to promote them but finding the time to.

## RECRUITING YOUR RESOURCES

This year, his garden center has undergone some major changes. Jacob has been focused on knowledgeable sales staff, signage, point of sale and displays.

Adding one more piece to the puzzle seemed overwhelming to him, but I persuaded him to set up a small display of award-winning plants. I asked him to make the display simple and leave it up for a short time period to see how consumers took to it. I also asked him to have his sales staff play-up the display for added promotion.

He decided to set up a small display by himself. It was simple, yet got the message across; it had straightforward signage and some pamphlets describing the awards and what they mean to the consumer. To keep the display full of products and looking tidy, he asked two volunteer salespeople to rotate coming in every other day, 15 minutes before their scheduled shift, to organize the display. Every day the display needed some replenishing. Jacob was amazed by the reaction he received from consumers by simply placing items in a display and providing information.

After a week and a strong consumer reaction, Jacob decided to set up another display. Sometimes, a simple, easy-to-care-for display sells just as much as an elaborate one. You just need to make it appealing to the customer and eye-catching.

The next promotion we felt would go over well was a display promoting new varieties introduced by seed companies. We marketed on the desire of the consumer to be ahead of the game, even in the garden. We used the slogan, "Grow the best. Buy the newest."

Jacob positioned a small display directly in front of the entrance. It was in a path that consumers could not miss as they entered the garden center and briefly introduced what a new variety was and let the customer know that whenever they saw the sign saying, "Grow the best. Buy the newest," they would be looking at a new variety. He asked his sales staff to work a bit of overtime to find all new varieties within the store and place the sign appropriately. Consumer reaction was positive, and Jacob has committed to doing the same promotion next year.

You'll never get through the spring rush while trying to set up and maintain displays. Recruiting time from your sales staff is necessary. To help with display projects, Jacob periodically works with the area school system to have high school students come in and work specifically on displays. There are many opportunities for help out there. Displays can definitely be a lot of work, but with careful planning and creative thinking, their rewards can far outweigh the costs. Use your resources wisely, and see what you can come up with. 🌱

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