



TO BE OR NOT TO BE

A few things to think about when designing your gift department to be a destination.

By Carrie Burns

How often do customers come into your garden center strictly for a gift? Not as often as you'd like I'm sure. Your customers probably come in for their garden needs and happen to pass by your gift department, only to have something catch their eye. Of course, there's nothing wrong with that, right? But, wouldn't you love to have a customer come in one week to buy a gift for her mother, then come in two weeks later for her gardening needs? Not many out there would say no to that.

Pasquesi's Garden Center, Barrington and Lake Forest, Ill., prides itself on its accent/gift area and considers it a destination, while just down the street from the Barrington location, in Lake Zurich, Ill., Atrium Garden Center (read more about

The Atrium on page 8) focuses more on its green goods. It's all a matter of individuality and your customer base.

If you are going to make your store a destination for gifts, you have to step into it! While it's a difficult action to take with successful results, it is possible.

ORGANIZATION

In most garden centers, customers can easily see where the green goods department is — in the greenhouse, right? The gift department is a little more difficult for consumers to determine the location.

The gift department should be separated from the other areas of the store, but it needs to be highly visible, as customers aren't accustomed to shopping your store for products not relating to gardening. Including some signage above the department would help.

The gift department should catch your customers' eyes. Top: Pasquesi's Garden Center, Barrington, Ill. Bottom: Craig Bergmann's Country Garden, Winthrop Harbor, Ill.

Wind chimes

The handcrafted ceramic Botanical Garden Chimes were inspired by the blazing foliage of the autumn season. Rich hues of orange, rust and brown come alive in this chime. The chimes are meant for outdoor use and withstand extremely high winds. The nylon-blended cording resists sun and rain. Individually gift-boxed using recycled paper, each distinctive package features a full-color photo of the enclosed chime. Caramba. (800) 506-8916. **Write in 1518**



Candles

This pot and tray combination candle set is glazed in various watercolors, and pots are filled with citronella wax. Perfect for the patio and yard and made in Portugal. Potina. (800) 222-2095. **Write in 1527**



Apron

The oversized pouch on the Sacka-da-Weeda garden apron does away with buckets, bending over, raking and messy piles. The pouch seals with Velcro and empties in seconds into your wheelbarrow or compost pile. Featuring deep side pockets for tools and accessories and a crossover strap that is comfortable and easy to use. Smart Gardner. (866) 680-9333. **Write in 1528**



Another possibility in signage is to post gift department signage within other areas of the store. In the green goods section, create a vignette and include a sign pointing customers to the gift department. "Don't forget to shop for those birthdays coming up. Visit our popular gift area inside."

SERVICE

Customer service is important in any area of the store, and though gifts can sometimes sell themselves, this department is no exception. Depending on the size of the garden center and gift department, the gift area should have a department manager or a primary employee dedicated to this area. This employee should stay in the gift department for the majority of the day and have knowledge of the products that you stock. If the store has a floral department, the manager could manage both departments, as floral items are typically given as gifts.



Terrarium

A verdigris-like finish gives this desktop terrarium a weathered look. Virtually maintenance-free after initial set-up, the terrarium can last up to six months before rewatering. Measuring 13 inches high and 6.5 inches square, it fits in any home or office location. Features include glass panes that keep pests out and moisture in. Mark Feldstein and Associates Inc. (419) 867-9500. **Write in 1529**

MERCHANDISE

You have to create a gift department that catches the customer's eye once they're in the store. What you do in the present will make them come back in the future.

Here's an often-asked question in our industry: What constitutes a gift? There are lotions, candles, candle holders, books, t-shirts and even plant material. Just about anything can be a gift; because of this, clutter is often a problem when it comes to merchandising gifts/accents. Try to not carry 15 different lines of dinnerware. The number of SKUs within a category should be limited. Find a few high-impact pieces — pieces that make a big statement with the fewest possible number of items.

Just as with the green goods department, or any other retail store, the gift buyer, or whoever is responsible for gift buying, is key in how successful your gift department will be. The buyer should stay up-to-date on trends, especially collectibles, as they can easily position a garden center as a destination for gifts.

Buyers should attend trade shows (both industry and public), read consumer magazines, watch television programs — anything that will put them in the world of the consumer, especially your average customer, whether that person is male or female, young or old, high-income or medium-income, or any other defining characteristic. Being in tune with your customer base will help. For example, M.I. Hummel collectibles may be attractive to your customers, but not to the customers in another region. 🦘

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Clock/thermometer

The 12- x 12-inch clock and 12- x 12-inch thermometer are made of a durable resin with a hand-applied finish. Features include a Fahrenheit thermometer scale, precision quartz clock movement and pre-packed shelf display for easier merchandising. Opus Inc. (508) 966-0470. **Write in 1526** ♦