



## DEVELOPING MARKETS

# Take A Look At Books

Carrying books at your garden center can round out your product offerings and give consumers everything they need for a project.

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  
July: Art  
August: Books  
November: Home Accessories

With the advent of the superstore booksellers, such as Barnes & Noble and Borders, in the mid 1970s and their rising popularity throughout the 1990s, many small, independent booksellers have been driven out of business. The superstores have large floor spaces, huge inventories, discounted merchandise and amenities such as cof-

fee bars, armchairs and more — details that are difficult for small businesses to replicate, which is the main reason many retailers are frightened away from carrying books.

Yet, books can be a successful addition to your garden center. The key is to carry new, interesting titles in genres that will appeal to your consumer base. And it couldn't hurt to take a few ideas from the superstores — like creating a reading area and adding a

couple of armchairs and a coffee table. Ultimately, adding books can help round out your product offerings and give consumers everything they need in the hobby category.

Despite the lure of electronic media (television, movies, MP3 players and video games), people are still buying books for entertainment and knowledge. According to the Association of American Publishers, net sales for the U.S. publishing industry are estimated to have increased by 9.9 percent from 2004 to 2005, reaching a total of \$25.1 billion. The American Booksellers Association estimates that this year retail bookstores brought in an estimated \$937 million in April, \$1,041 million in March, \$1,052 million in February and \$2,143 million in January.

### Narrow The Choices

It does not make sense to try and compete with large-scale booksellers: The variety of books they carry and the low prices they sell at are hard to beat if you are a small retailer (especially one that does not focus wholly on selling books). This means you need to find your own book-selling niche, which may mean carrying a focused selection that appeals directly to your already-established consumer base.

One option is to carry books that relate to the merchandise departments your garden center already sells. This helps ease some of the risk of carrying books: Since the other merchandise departments are already present in your garden center, you know their success rates and how much they appeal to your customers.

An obvious choice is to sell gardening and plant-related books — but don't limit yourself to the obvious. Garden centers that have found success with workshops and seminars



Try carrying books that relate to the merchandise departments your garden center already sells.



Bookshelves make it easy for customers to see available titles and choose what they want.

can carry crafting books. Those that cater to birding clubs often carry birding books. The same idea applies to wine, food, pet care, jewelry and more. Simply identify which departments bring in the most customers, and stock related books. Also consider carrying a few magazines; it's yet another way to offer more for your customers in the categories they love.

### How To Pick Books

How-to books are a natural fit for garden centers, because they appeal to everyone regardless of skill level and are available for nearly every department: cooking, pet care, gardening, decorating and more. And unlike the latest bestsellers, how-to books do not move quickly in and out of popular appeal.

Of course, the types of how-to books you choose to carry depend largely on your customers. For instance, if you have garden-savvy shoppers who already know the ins and outs of maintaining their gardens, carry detailed books geared toward intermediate and advanced gardeners — the kinds of books that are likely to contain plants' botanical names. Novice gardeners will appreciate books that stick to the basics. Carrying a mix of advanced and beginner options is the best way to have something for everyone.

Keep in mind that how-to books vary in design. Look for books that are easy to navigate (especially those for beginners). A detailed table of contents, chapters, subheads, bullet points, charts and graphs help make a book easier to digest. Look at the author's language: Is it direct and clear? Is it easy to understand?

Ultimately, you want to find how-to books that do not intimidate customers. If the books look confusing or too difficult to understand and

customers do not think they can learn from them, the books will never leave your store.

### Look To The Superstores

Though they may be unpopular with small retailers, the superstore booksellers know how to appeal to consumers. Visit a local Barnes & Noble or Borders regularly to see what is new in bookselling: How do they display the books? How do they market them? What do they offer to consumers that you could offer?

An easy idea to replicate is that of a comfortable reading area for customers. Clear some space near the book display in your garden center and add comfortable chairs and a table. The area will allow book browsers to relax and take their time. It can also be a place for exhausted spouses to sit while their better halves continue to shop.

If you have an in-store café, think about creating a book display (or the whole section) near the seating area. That way people will be encouraged to look at the titles as they sip their beverages. Just be aware that accidents do happen, and you may lose a few volumes due to spills.

### Think Off The Shelf

Certainly, if you choose to carry books in your garden center, you will want to bring in some bookshelves to display the inventory on the selling floor: Bookshelves make it easy for customers to see available titles and choose what they want. They also aid employees in organization and restocking. But do not rely solely on the shelves for merchandising.

Try incorporating small book displays throughout the garden center, especially if you carry books that complement different departments. ▶

**P**at Colwell, a co-manager at Rosedale Nurseries, Inc., Hawthorne, N.Y., described the book section in her store.

#### How long have you been stocking books?

Well, I've been here for 17 years, and they carried books before I arrived.

#### What made you decide to add books?

They're a great add-on sale, and they're also great for information use. When people have questions, we can just refer to a book because we don't claim to know it all.

#### How much space do you devote to it?

We have a little area in the back of our store that is pretty much like our library. I don't know the square footage of the area, but we have three bookshelves from floor to ceiling. We also have a table up front with new arrivals or most popular books.

#### What kind of books do you sell?

[We sell] a number of books for the serious gardener. Just a lot of resource books, not a lot of coffee-table books.

#### What is your philosophy in choosing the products?

I like to actually look at the books, so I like to go to the trade shows and go through them, or even when I'm in a bookstore myself, I like to put my hands on it and look through it. Anything, I guess, that has information I haven't seen before, that wouldn't be found in your common reference book. Oftentimes I look for good photographs of plants because that always entices the consumer.

#### What products sell best?

Probably the reference books, [we sell] a number of those.

#### What kind of margin do you get?

Most of the companies I deal with will allow a 40-percent mark up.

#### Who is responsible for product selection and helping customers?

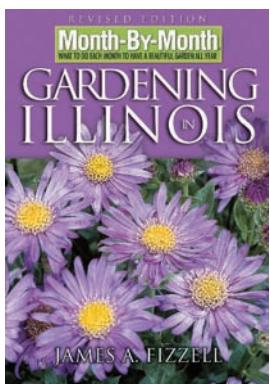
I am, and all of the salespeople [help with book sales].

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

On occasion. I have to say maybe in the winter months for a nice add-on sale or for a last-minute thing up at the register. Sometimes people just like to buy a gift for someone, and it's a nice gift. ☺



Rosedale Nurseries carries a number of books geared toward serious gardeners.



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### 5. Gardening book

*Month by Month Gardening in Illinois Revised Edition: What To Do Each Month to Have a Beautiful Garden All Year* is written by James Fizzell, a horticulturist. He stresses that the preparation done in the late winter/early spring may hold the key to unearthing an aesthetically and structurally sound garden later. Cool Springs Press. (800) 251-4000. Write in 1412

### 6. Red Hat Society book

*Fun and Friendship After Fifty* contains the beginnings of the Red Hat Society, a guide to life by Ruby RedHat (The Red Hat Society mascot) and different stories from Red Hat members. The book also contains narratives from Sue Ellen Cooper, founder of the Red Hat Society. Red Hat Society Store. (866) 386-2850. Write in 1418

### 7. Children's book

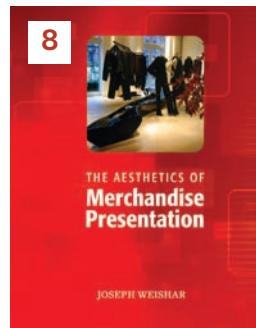
The *101 My First Text-Board-Books* series features major universities across the country. Each book is designed for the featured college and showcases the school's traditions, sports, campus and enthusiasm. Michaelson Entertainment. (310) 899-3739. Write in 1413

### 8. Merchandising book

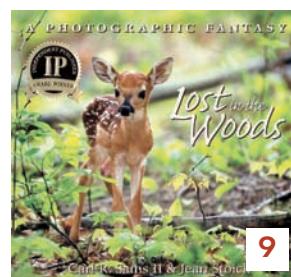
*The Aesthetics of Merchandise Presentation*, by Joseph Weishar, teaches the principles of merchandise presentation. He points out that the elements shared by successful stores are careful attention to displays, levels of stock and customers' sense of aesthetics. ST Media Group. (800) 421-1321. Write in 1420

### 9. Storybook

*Lost in the Woods* tells the tale of woodland creatures that are concerned for a newborn fawn they believe to be lost. It consists of 48 color pages. Carl R. Sams II Photography, Inc. (800) 552-1867. Write in 1415



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### Learn More!

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Imagine a stack of outdoor living books placed on the table of a patio set display. Try putting some how-to guides near displays that consumers frequently ask questions about, such as water gardening or landscaping. By cross merchandising, you let consumers know that you carry books specific to their interests (even if they never make it over to the book department).

### Celebrate Books

You can stir up a love for reading

### Resources

#### Associations:

American Booksellers Association  
[www.bookweb.org](http://www.bookweb.org)

American Book Producers Association  
[www.abpaonline.org](http://www.abpaonline.org)

Association Of American Publishers  
[www.publishers.org](http://www.publishers.org)

#### Web Sites:

The Book Standard  
[www.thebookstandard.com](http://www.thebookstandard.com)

#### Trade shows:

Book Expo  
June 1-3, 2007  
New York City, N.Y.  
[www.bookexpoamerica.com](http://www.bookexpoamerica.com)

in your community by holding book-related events at your garden center. Doing so will bring consumers to your store and publicize your book inventory. Try stocking regional titles and bringing the authors in for book signings. If you carry children's books, host a reading for kids and have employees dress up as characters from the book.

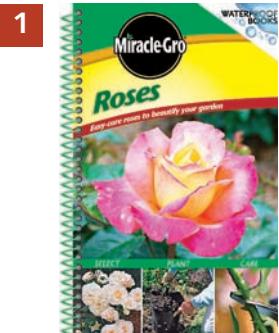
Another good way to bring people in is to encourage book clubs to meet at your garden center — just make sure you know how many people are

expected and have enough space to accommodate them. Try giving special coupons to club members for use on store book purchases, or if you have an in-store café, give club members a discount on beverages purchased during meetings.

You can also use your employees to encourage reading. Employees can refer curious customers to select titles that will help them answer questions or give them more knowledge about a topic. Of course, this means employees will need to be

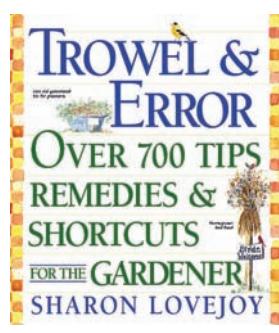
knowledgeable about the book selection: Designate one copy of each title as the "store copy." Employees can leaf through them on their breaks, and customers can thumb through them before purchasing the title. Eventually, you can sell these at a reduced rate (because they will likely see a lot of use). ☺

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#### 1. Water-resistant books

The new Waterproof Books series is designed to be water resistant and have dirt-proof, tear-resistant pages so the books can be used in gardens. Other features include UV-protective ink, color photos and spiral binding. The books measure 5x8 inches. Different titles are available. Meredith Books. (800) 678-8091. **Write in 1414**



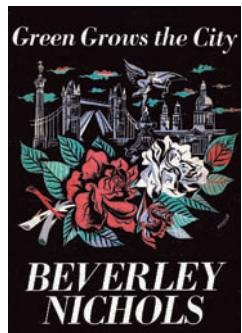
#### 2. Gardening advice book

*Trowel and Error: Over 700 Tips, Remedies and Shortcuts for the Gardener*, by Sharon Lovejoy, contains remedies, tips, short cuts, cure alls and other gardening advice that the author has discovered throughout her life. It is intended to benefit gardeners from beginning to experienced. Workman Publishing Company. (212) 254-5900. **Write in 1417**



#### 3. Journal

This journal features a stitched spine, a paper-lined interior and 80 ivory-lined pages. A ribbon bookmark is also included. It measures 5½ inches wide and 8¾ inches tall. Trend Marketing. (800) GO-TREND. **Write in 1419**



#### 4. Autobiographical gardening book

*Green Grows the City*, by Beverly Nichols, details the author's trials while making a new garden in a London suburb in the years just before World War II. The book will be released August 2006. Timber Press, Inc. (800) 327-5680. **Write in 1416**

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