

BETTER MERCHANDISING EQUALS MORE SALES

By Forrest Stegelin, University of Georgia



Although a lot of floriculture sales are spontaneous purchases, most purchasers of floriculture, nursery, and garden materials have decided they have the money to spend. Therefore, it is important to create an environment that urges them to purchase the goods they need from your business, and spend their money at your greenhouse, garden center, florist shop, plant nursery, or lawn and garden store. So here are a few tips to keep in mind.

- ◆ **Outdoor signing and display are crucial.** If you feature seeds, bulbs, small containers, foliage, and other small goods that need to stay in the store, use banners to proclaim their arrival. Use words like "Fresh Bulbs Are Here" or "Flower Power Available Now." Move green goods and hard goods outside in season so people consciously walk around them to reach the door.
- ◆ **Add your own signs inside.** Make it easy for customers to see what's new. Point out new varieties, colors, hand tools, containers, etc. These encourage impulse purchases, as well as establish you as the gardening expert.
- ◆ **Hold seminars, or invite experts into your store to advise customers.** The key to growing sales is to help customers overcome the fear of failure. Once you get them started, make sure they are successful. If you've shown them how and helped them create a super-fantastic container garden or a lush flower garden or an outstanding landscape with colorful flowers, they'll be back to buy more.
- ◆ **Encourage package purchases.** Have your plant materials grouped in such a way as to make it easy for people to find all their needs at your store. 'Garden rooms' are an example of packaged or bundled goods.
- ◆ **Service and suggestive selling work.** Ask what they are trying to do, and then mention what products you have that can help. Offer opportunities rather than solutions; after all, not all purchases are problem-solvers.
- ◆ **Don't forget container gardening.** Many people who may not have lots of space would like to participate in flower gardening. Help them by featuring compact plants with the right containers. Window boxes, hanging baskets, plant towers, concrete planters, half-barrels, and individual plastic containers are examples of possible containers.
- ◆ **Keep green plants off the ground.** Raise them up for best sales and ease of purchase. No one wants to bend down with their derriere in the air to look at plants, unless they're already established in a landscape.
- ◆ **Tag all plant packs and selling units.** Use the colored tags that show people what the plant will look like when mature. After all, you are selling a promise and imagination is needed.
- ◆ **Create goodwill among employees and special customers.** Don't toss damaged plants. Share them with employees or a special customer. Or donate them to a local worthy cause. Or offer to a loyal 'Master Gardener' as a "challenge," but damaged plants in a mulch pile visible to the customers does not say quality.
- ◆ **Use what you sell.** Beautify your own place of business with the plants you sell; show by example how to use your plant materials.
- ◆ **Hold contests. Take photos.** This encourages people to share their success. Have a 'wall of fame' of photos for those customers who have purchased flats and containers of annuals and flowering perennials for their landscapes. You should also be able to receive coverage in the local newspaper.
- ◆ **Know what's new.** Especially for seasoned gardeners, they like to know what's new for the season and for this year. If you have it, and that includes the plants promotions such as the Georgia Gold Medal Winners, you'll be recognized as an innovator.
- ◆ **Work with garden clubs and professional landscapers.** These clubs and professionals can often be centers of influence for less experienced gardeners and home owners. Also, help sponsor beautification programs for medians and intersections in the community, as well as the community's parks department.
- ◆ **Identify drought-tolerant species.** Point customers toward varieties that are touted as drought-tolerant, pollution-tolerant, poor-soil-drainage tolerant, low-maintenance-tolerant, or whatever tolerance is likely to be wanted or experienced in your sales area. A 'win-win' situation for you and your customer is the goal.
- ◆ **Tie into national and regional promotional campaigns.** National Garden Week, Arbor Day, and other promotional campaigns are ways to kick off a selling season. Companies, associations and media are blitzing people with the message in magazines, newspapers, public service announcements, and the internet. You can hitch onto their coattails, and pick up sales.