

## HOW WE PROMOTE PERENNIALS AT SUNBEAM FARMS, INC.

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Many years ago I learned that the promotion of perennials should rest with the producer, if he is selling through garden centers. Why? Because perennials are only about 3% of the total sales at the average garden center. This percentage should be much higher - and I think it is rising, but this will only happen if we growers do a good job of raising a fine line of perennials that are in excellent selling condition, bursting with stamina, then supply the customer with information. Let him know what these plants will do for their customer - and you have the winning combination! Remember, ninety percent of our plants are sold to the home gardener at a time when they are small and have no eye appeal. Written descriptions and pictures are a must.

Since our product is such a small percentage of garden center sales, we can be sure that garden centers are not going to put forth much effort in promoting the perennial. One way or another we have to help, or simply take over the job of promotion ourselves.

Our first step is to begin with plants that are ready to sell the day they are delivered to the garden store. We will have little trouble promoting the sale of Arabis, Iberis, Primulas, or Violas in the spring as their spring bloom will automatically draw customers to the perennial department.

For the next few minutes, I would like to discuss with you some of the methods that we have employed to sell our perennials that have no early spring eye appeal and, for the most part, we have covered that full cost of this promotion effort. Though we furnish sales aids, we do not set up their display table. However, we do encourage the garden center to display our container perennials on a table where their traffic pattern is very heavy. We put a "Tag-Along" in every plant with a picture, where possible, and hope that this is kept to the front of the pot. This helps a lot, however, the pictures are small and the print is smaller, and so for the customers - like my wife, who have forgotten their glasses, we furnish 8 x 10 inch "Floral Cards" for as many varieties as possible. These can also be displayed with the plants and are a terrific help to the garden center as they carry much information where the plant can be used best in the garden and they also have sufficient room for the price to be written in.

How and where a plant can be used successfully in a home garden is a question asked many, many times and unfortunately too many of the department personnel at the modern day plant centers do not have the answers for these questions. So we try to supply additional information beyond the few sentences included with the picture. A simple way, for a start of doing this is to have several thousand price lists printed, excluding the price column (or listed price), that are coded to the best use of each plant. These lists are very helpful for the garden sales people to use and can also be used as hand out information. They tell you if a plant can be used as a cut flower, ground cover, an herb, or a rock plant and whether to plant in full sun, partial sun, or shade. This information just scratches the surface, but for the inexperienced gardener or the new sales person in the garden department, it can be most helpful. Once we learn the type of plants that the customer wants and more information is needed, we also supply small hand-

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books entitled "Perennials grown by Sunbeam Farms" for the sales person or for the garden center customer.

Inside the cover of this booklet there is a bit of information about the perennial. Then there are descriptions of the plants, and additional uses are listed for the different varieties. The inside back page lists various garden conditions and some of the better varieties that can be grown in each. We believe that giving this type of assistance cannot help but lead to more sales. You can also purchase additional color handouts on perennials from Bedding Plants Inc., Walters Garden, as well as other sources.

Some of our customers who are willing to put a fair supply of our potted perennials in their department are furnished a handbook of 84 beautifully illustrated display cards as well as this poster - also containing the 84 display cards. These posters can be displayed year around creating interest in our plants whenever people visit the garden center.

Promotion should not be limited to the heavy selling season. Later, I will mention a few ways that have proven effective from late winter throughout the growing season. I would like to give you an example of how a combination of various promotion tactics helped one of our local garden centers to build up his sales to around 18,000 or 20,000 one or two quart size potted perennials a year. This is about three times the amount of this same size plants that a nearby garden center sells that has a two or three times greater yearly gross. This is real proof that people will buy our product if enough effort is used to show the customer what to use, where to plant it and when to plant it. They don't want to be doubtful - they want to know!

This customer displayed in mass and kept plants in good condition. One idea that seems to stimulate thoughts of gardening to the customer is to divide the display area in such a way that you have a section for each need that a person has for plants. Often, a variety can be displayed in two or three different areas. For example, Ajuga may be shown as a ground cover, or a shade plant, Hardy Pinks as a cut flower or in a rock garden and in with fragrant flowers.

Until now I have talked mostly about helping to promote at point of sales. This in turn helps us to continue selling our perennials, and increasing our sales. However, our promotion is not limited to point of sales information. We have found that by sending our personnel to a Seminar on perennials to give a talk and answer questions we have covered another angle. This is again, bringing our specialty to the customer as the Seminar is open to the public and many come to learn more about perennials.

We have run newspaper ads listing many of our better perennials, and where they can be obtained within the reading area of that particular newspaper. We pay for this advertising and we only require the garden center to buy a certain number of plants from us and to stock the varieties of plants listed in the ad. We have used this method only in the Cleveland area but since it was so successful we feel that buying newspaper advertising over a larger area has merit. We know that this type of advertising does much to boost sales of fertilizer and other garden center items, so why not perennials?

Still another method we have employed since we were a young business is furnishing plants for display gardens. Tastefully planned gardens can be right at your nursery for the public's information and enjoyment. Plants can be furnished

for display gardens at the garden stores. Put gardens at the County Fair, the Home and Flower Show, or if you personally are not planting the garden, give the plants to the individual making the display garden. It is worth the money involved. To name just a few more, why not furnish plants for a park display, a garden, experimental station or your University?

Work closely with your Horticultural Department at the State University and Vocational Schools in your area. Don't forget that the students who are working with and learning from the perennials we have made available to them, are the men and women who in a few years will be using and selling our products.