

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Merchandising: Selling Statuary and Fountain

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Just as a perfect piece of jewelry or a necktie can pull together an ensemble, an ideally placed fountain or statue can pull together an outdoor oasis. Whether they stand on one leg, two legs or four legs, accent pieces like birdbaths, fountains, ducks, frogs and dogs abound at garden centers.

While some garden centers prefer to group their statues together like a friendlier version of the White Witch's courtyard in Narnia, other garden centers choose to spread them throughout the sales area. From California to New York, here are five garden centers offering the unique ways they tantalize customers with burbling fountains and frozen-in-time animals.

Mike Wronkowski, nursery manager, Green Arrow Nursery, North Hills, California.

Mike King, hardlines buyer, Petitti Garden Centers, greater Cleveland, Ohio.

Sean Carroll, nursery buyer, Roger's Gardens, Corona del Mar, California.

Tim James, president, Atrium Garden Center, Inc., Lake Zurich, Illinois.

Andy Chen, manager, Lieb's Greenhouses, Inc., New Rochelle, New York.

What brands of fountains and statuary do you carry?

M.W. Al's Garden Art, Trevi, Avila's Garden Art and Art Craft Statuary, Inc.

M.K. Henri Studio, Massarelli's.

T.J. We are an exclusive seller of Henri Studio.

A.C. We sell mostly Campania.

What are the best sellers?

M.W. Trevi seems to be one of our best sellers. We've been carrying that brand for two years.

M.K. Smaller statuary and fountains under \$500.

S.C. Roger's sells a lot of statues: lions, dogs and St. Francis are the most popular. Roger's has a variety of fountains that sell equally as well. It seems that the guests have their own style and décor.

T.J. Fountains are always good sellers. We promote the fountains with a dedicated area and sales person.

A.C. Lots of birdbaths, St. Francis and animals—we sell more pigs than anything else. Also, people build ponds and put [statuary] fish and ducks in them.

What are the latest trends?

M.K. Stains instead of paint, and fountains with lights.

S.C. Cut stone! Natural and limestone are very popular.

A.C. Pedestals. Also, the trend went from religious and serious to less serious like animals. Designs were more complicated, now they are smooth and modern.

How and where do you display statuary?

M.W. We display our statuary inside our stores on the shelves by the entrance and some on our color table between flowering plants. The fountains are displayed in front of the store near the parking lot, and in the center and back of the nursery.

M.K. We display them in covered areas adjacent to our annuals departments. We have the statuary department in five of our seven stores.

T.J. The fountains are displayed in a prominent area, along the path that leads through the store to the greenhouse and then to the outdoor sales area.

A.C. We blend the pottery and statuary in with the plants. We show customers how pieces can be placed in their gardens.

What are the challenges in selling statuary?

M.W. There are no challenges in selling statuary. They pretty much sell themselves as long as you display them right and they're running. But I do feel that the water ponds sales compete with the fountain business. More people seem to be into garden ponds because there are so many different ways to design a pond and so many different ways to add features to them.

M.K. Space allocations, handling (delivery and set-up), and profit margins.

S.C. Building small displays all over the garden center. It gives the guests different ideas on how to decorate at home.

T.J. The sale of fountains requires good customer service to educate the buyers on how the systems work. Many customers think there is a hose attachment. They don't know that it's a re-circulating pump and that it must be cleaned often in order for it to last. Winterizing requires the drainage of all water, a cover on the fountain, and straw or burlap under the cover to collect condensation and prevent cracks. We offer installation services. Fountains are heavy products and require common sense when assembling. They have to be level to work properly.

What doesn't work when displaying statuary?

M.W. Green Arrow has found that displaying statuary with our fountains doesn't work. The statues aren't seen by the customers and are easily damaged.

M.K. Mixing in too many plants, and not having the fountains running.

S.C. Bunching all of the statues and fountains together in one spot.

T.J. Electricity can be a problem.

Customers want to see running fountains, but sometimes electricity isn't available near a fountain. Also, the combination of electricity and water blows fuses.

How often are the displays changed to keep it fresh for returning customers?

S.C. Maybe once a year. We try not to move the fountains too much. They are very heavy and moving them often can cause damage.

T.J. We mix it up about two times a year.

A.C. We change displays when new things come in, but we are always moving things around.

Do you have any suggestions for increasing profits with statuary and fountain sales?

M.W. Stay in communication with your suppliers to see what new styles are available. Green Arrow orders fountains every two to four weeks. Discontinue the old styles. Display your fountains throughout your nursery—make them the first things customers see when they come to your store. Most importantly, have your fountains running—customers want a fountain that makes a lot of water noise.

S.C. The way we display them now is the best way. The items are not stuck in one space. You see them at every turn.

T.J. You have to be dedicated to it, with a knowledgeable sales person, and offer installation services. You have to show them how to run and clean the fountains. Show them there are different styles and colors. GP

ASK THE EXPERT

Q & A with Peter C. Cilio, VP and creative director for Campania

What are the new trends in fountains and statuary?

We're seeing a trend in smaller, more manageable fountains. For statuary, anything that's fun and interesting that people can pick up and take home with them.

What feedback do you hear from garden centers?

We've always welcomed input and have acted upon our customers' suggestions. For instance, many have wanted lighter-weight fountains, so we responded with a collection of lightweight wall and stand-alone fountains that weigh under 35 lbs.

How would you advise garden centers to increase their profits by the sales of fountains and statuary?

Garden Centers can increase revenue by running the fountains in their stores. Make sure they're clean, and have a variety of sizes and styles for the consumer to choose from. People love to hear the sound of running water. Group statuary to make an impact, display as end caps in garden center or group with greenery. Have an area where the customers can view all of the different styles of statuary.