

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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“Look What I GREW!”

Chris Beytes



Amy Schmidt shows off the giant hanging basket she designed and grew during Moss Basket Day at Pahl's Market, Apple Valley, Minnesota. Lending a hand with the massive basket is head grower Lance Himmelwright (who did the real growing).

Amy is one of more than 1,000 customers who planted 1,250 hanging baskets during Pahl's 15th annual Moss Basket Day, an event that lets consumers design and plant their own large hanging basket (a moss basket in the beginning, but today they use Western Pulp fiber baskets). Amy, her daughter, two

sisters and a niece have made this a 10-year family tradition.

Moss Basket Day is held on the first two Saturdays of March, plus a couple of weekdays, explains co-owner Gary Pahl. Customers sign up for a 30-minute planting session (about 35 people per session), in which they get to plant 12 to 15 plugs (depending on if they're growing a 16-in. or 20-in. basket). They can choose plugs from anything Pahl's has brought in for their own planting—literally hundreds of varieties, so the resulting baskets are a unique sight.

Pahl's charges \$65 or \$85, depending on the size basket they want. For an extra \$5 customers can get holes punched in the side of their basket for extra plants. Baskets are labeled with the owner's name and its location in the moss basket area. Larry grows them on for pickup in May.

The name “Moss Basket” is no longer exactly accurate. Gary says they started out using sphagnum moss baskets, then switched to wire baskets with coco mat liners. But for the past two years they've grown in Western Pulp fiber baskets. It's easier to drill holes in the sides for those who want that, Gary says. Plus, they retain water nicely and have a “cleaner” look, he adds.

Apparently it's a big event in Apple Valley in March. “It's kind of a spring party atmosphere,” says Lance. Perhaps that's because alcohol is served. “We don't tell anybody that, but yeah ...” Gary admits with a chuckle. “I wanted to cut it out probably 10 years ago, but my wife said, ‘If you cut it out, I'm done working it. And half your people won't show up.’ So I just bit my lip and said okay.” To keep the planters from getting

plastered, they're issued just two drink tickets each.

At \$65 to \$85, do they make money? "Yeah," Gary answers. "Not only do you make money, they give you the money in March, so it's like a free loan. And they come back at least three times: when they're there to plant; usually they swing in to look at it once or twice; then when they come back to get it they pick up a few other things then. And they generally come back a week after that to do a majority of their shopping. You get a lot of store traffic off it."

Lance adds that it lets them see what new plants are attractive to consumers, and they'll adjust their numbers accordingly. "It's nice to get a pulse of what people are wanting each year." **GT**