

Capitalizing on the Veggie Trend

We've seen an increase in demand for vegetables in recent years as more and more people get interested in raising their own food. If you aren't capitalizing on this trend, you are missing out on some easy sales and the opportunity to inspire the next generation of gardeners. People of all ages are getting connected to where their food comes from and looking to grow their own.

MAKE IT EASY, MAKE IT FUN

One trend you might watch to get ideas about your own vegetable offering is the increase in farmers markets. Farmers markets offer shoppers a chance to meet growers and learn about where their food comes from and how it's grown. And, let's face it, farmers markets are FUN! Many have music, freshly baked treats, cooking, canning and home fermenting demonstrations, and then there's the huge assortment of vegetables to pick from. Heirlooms in all sizes, new hybrids in gorgeous colors and flavors make for a great opportunity to try new things. Foodies, or people who are particularly interested in gourmet foods, love these places. We can make our vegetable plant offerings a fun place of discovery and learning as well.

Another interesting food trend is the explosive growth of subscription meal services like Blue Apron, Plated and Chef'd. These are the services that deliver all the fresh ingredients needed to make gourmet meals at home. Blue Apron alone sends more than 500,000 meals a month!

The combination of fresh ingredients, simple recipes, and having everything proportioned takes the guesswork out of cooking and makes it simple and appealing for new cooks to try new things. What a great idea to steal for growing our own food. Make it easy!

Now is the time to try to capitalize on these growing movements. We know that Millennial men are getting into vegetable gardening in bigger numbers and Baby Boomers are retiring, downsizing and growing their own food. We also know many Millennials are apartment dwellers and first time homeowners. How can we leverage this to increase our vegetable sales? I suggest we take a page from farmers markets and subscription services and use the ideas of discovering new things and make growing your own food easier and more exciting.

CREATE INTEREST AT RETAIL

Taking a critical look at your offering is the first step. Are you still selling the same 10 tomatoes you've been selling for

the last 30 years? No doubt they're good, but maybe it's time for a refresh. Head out to shop your local farmers markets and see what people are buying. Do you carry those varieties? If not, why not add them and offer a collection of Farmers Market Favorites or Foodie Favorites so your customers can easily identify that variety they loved last summer?

At retail, display your vegetable offerings in a way that creates real interest to foodie gardeners. Don't relegate vegetables to the back of the store, but celebrate the diversity of your offering with endcaps and new display fixtures. Group those varieties that are known for fantastic flavor, gorgeous color or unique edible foliage together. Cross merchandise your favorite sauce type tomato, (ahem, 'SuperSauce' from Burpee!) and the perfect basil with a sign reminding customers of your gourmet pasta selection inside. Then offer a recipe when you buy all three. Another idea to attract foodies, why not host an evening event with a local restaurant chef or bartender/mixologist and offer herb-centric cocktails?

Head out to shop your local farmers markets and see what people are buying.

THE SMALL SPACE GARDENER

Whether the end consumer is a Millennial living in the city with little room to garden or a Baby Boomer who recently downsized, many people have a need for varieties that work in small spaces. Recent introductions in nearly every class of vegetable will fit this need with everything from dwarf indeterminate tomatoes, restricted vine cucumbers and even squash.

Why not create a store within a store to showcase those varieties and cross-promote beautiful containers and window boxes? Be sure to offer a variety of patio ready plants for gardeners looking for instant gratification. It's important that your small space gardeners are successful so be realistic about the patio container size as nobody can water three times a day! Then make sure to have the same varieties in smaller pots for customers who plant in the ground.

Stepping up your game in vegetables doesn't have to be difficult. With a few creative twists you can take full advantage of all the new varieties being introduced to capture new gardeners and make them successful. After all, that's what gets them back for more. [gpn](#)



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