

# Maximizing Container Sales at Retail

*Here are some strategies and sales techniques to use at retail and to pass along to your garden center customers that not only sell more plants and containers, but also get repeat business!*

**BY CHRISTINA SALWITZ**





In the iconic movie “Forrest Gump”, Benjamin Buford “Bubba” Blue tells Forrest about a variety of shrimp dishes, over 21 in that scene to be exact. I’m sure that guy could have rattled off more given the opportunity. So, why do we find it so challenging to sell lots of containers and container designs when it can be as easy as Bubba selling Forrest his idea for the “fruit of the sea?” It comes down to having a simple strategy and great sales techniques.

Bubba just didn’t see any reason why shrimp didn’t go with, on or in everything did he? The same can be said for containers. No other category in the garden center covers more opportunity for sales and more importantly, *repeat sales* than containers.

If you are producing and selling containers, understanding why abundant container design sales are a key tool in your sales arsenal is important to be competitive in the face of fierce competition for the consumer’s attention, dollars and loyalty.

**POINTS TO PONDER**

What are consumers eager to get when they purchase great containers?



- 1) They want confirmation that they have made great plant choices.
- 2) They want to understand how they can get better at choosing, designing, maintaining, etc.
- 3) They want to be entertained with fresh and creative ideas they can’t get at other stores.
- 4) They want to know more about the retailer and feel like they can count on them for great guidance.

- When a garden center sells a container (let’s say an empty one) most of the time, they are going to at least try to sell with it:
- 1) Potting soil
  - 2) Fertilizer
  - 3) Plants (of course!)
  - 4) Maybe some kind of container insert for the pot
  - 5) Pot feet



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6) Maybe rock or some kind of mulch to dress the top up if soil can be seen

7) Garden art to go in the container as a design element. Glass? Metal? Wood? Miniatures?

At this point, you have to ask yourself if everyone from the store manager, buyer, salesperson, cashier and everyone in between including the person loading up cars are trained to ask if anything from the above list is missing before they leave the parking lot?

Now what if we are selling a fabulously creative designed container garden? You still have options to offer many of the above items to personalize or care for this creation. Each of

these opportunities are small instances where asking these questions, even if it's a few more times than last year, can really add up to big change in your container numbers.

#### **WHERE PRICING COMES INTO PLAY**

Pricing is another area where many growers and garden centers seem to get caught up in frustration. But pricing has many facets and more than just slapping a price on it and walking away. We are in the business of selling the customer inspiration. Making a great return on the container category means more than just the numbers you see when the container empty or planted goes through the checkout. You must

be able to understand how all of the dollars earned from all of the parts of the container sale come together to be able to fully appreciate that pricing isn't just about the price.

If a customer walks in the garden center and sees a display of containers with all of the fixin's and then the planted up containers and they buy one of the pots empty, they may also buy a few of the display plants and then springboard to others on the tables to create their own designs. Still success!

#### **EDUCATING THE CONSUMER**

The next step is to help that customer understand that now they have bought the



“room” (container) for their plants, it’s the grower and the garden center’s turn to show how they can help them choose seasonal furniture to change it out regularly.

*“If you would like to bring this pot back in spring, I would love to help you choose some new plants to ‘play’ with and come up with a new design. We can even plant it up for you if you decide that you want to drop it off. We can even deliver it back to your home once it’s all done if that works better for you.”*

The customer has purchased the 1) container 2) now they are bringing it back for a re-fill (more plants) 3) they tell their friends who see it and now want to have it done too! That’s three ways that one container sale made not only a sales impact, but a relational one as well. It’s not at all unusual for customers to get so comfortable with this seasonal process that they bring back multiple containers to be planted, then of course they will need some new containers and more plants at some point too.

What if this customer received the option to pre-purchase a subscription for “slipper pots” that can be slipped into their container two to three times per year? Each season can be based on a “fresh sheet” that the grower plans ahead with the buyer for some specialty or pre-booked plants. But what about potting up larger items like shrubs and trees?

*“I understand you have been working on upgrading bits and pieces of your landscape over time. Buying trees, shrubs and perennials to go in your containers for a season or two before transplanting them into the landscape is a wonderful way to extend your gardening dollars. The bonus is that you get fun containers where we just add in a few annuals, so you throw away fewer plants. It saves you quite a bit of money.”*

Independent garden centers can provide out-of-the-box design thinking to inspire 21st century consumers. The IGC is also much more agile at quick thinking, reacting to the specific needs of your local demographic and community to offer design ideas

specially suited to the people you know best.

By thinking globally about how the buyer, merchandiser, grower and everyone in between interacts with the customer, you have just increased your opportunity to

sell more container designs as opposed to just creating a few pretty pots, crossing your fingers that they are priced right and hoping they sell.

Bubba should be able to rattle off all the many ways to sell a

container design easily. *“That’s all I have to say about that.” gpn*

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