

Idea Exchange March 2002 - Spring Product Checklist

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It's also worth suggestive selling of some of these items that the water gardener might forget about, for example, asking customers about their supply of fresh filter pads at every transaction or suggesting fertilizer and a plant basket with every plant sale.

Take My Brochure, Please

Tetra introduced several point-of-purchase materials at the Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show in Baltimore during January, including its guide on building and maintaining ponds: in a laminated format for chaining to display shelves and as brochures to distribute to customers.

TetraPond business director Curt Nuenighoff described the brochures as ideal for novices asking "So, tell me what you know about water gardens."

Neuinghoff notes that the answers to those questions can easily tie up 45 minutes or more of the employee's time. With the brochures, potential clients can learn the basics and ask more specific questions later. Neuinghoff also suggests directing such customers to the garden center's next water gardening seminar. Ideal scenario:

Customer: Say, can you tell me all you know about garden ponds?"

Associate: I'd love to. We'll be holding a seminar on that very subject in two weeks. In the meantime, please take this brochure. It gives a nice overview of the subject and you'll be able to get a head start."

Other new POP materials included a cloth TetraPond banner and equipment stands.

Along those lines, a J&D Associates representative said some retailers had been selling Sera's two 36-page guides on building garden ponds and maintaining garden ponds for \$5 a pop. German company Sera provides these free to its dealers in packets of 25.

Space Over Profits

Although price cuts can boost market share (at least temporarily), poorly managed price cuts can damage a company's bottom line — often significantly.

A recent McKinsey & Co. study of several industries showed a one-percent price cut decreased operating profits by an average of 8 percent, market research firm P.K. Data of Atlanta reported.

In the food and drug sector, which was the industry closest to the lawn and garden sector of the studied industries, a one-percent price cut lopped off 23.7 percent from operating profits.

P.K. Data advises retailers to discount products to free up shelf space and fill that space with higher-yielding product.

Learn & Earn

Increasing numbers of retailers are supporting local schools in innovative ways, according to Orchard Street Associates, a manufacturers rep group serving the home and garden gift market.

Ongoing programs generate good publicity, community goodwill and personal satisfaction. Among Orchard's suggestions: donating money or merchandise to reward outstanding teachers and students or donating time (yours or your employees) to worthy projects, such as reading programs.

Many landscapers and pond retailers already construct ponds for schools to use to teach ecology and related lessons. The ponds can stimulate interest in water gardening, and an on-site plaque or sign acknowledging the donation could lure customers for years to come.

Of course, monitor the pond over the years to ensure it's not neglected and therefore a poor reflection on your business.

Food for Thought

With the major pet retail chains expanding their pond offerings, destination water garden retailers may be challenged to bring clients back for basic staples such as food.

Depending on local market conditions, a private-label koi food might make sense. Richard Chesler, owner of Water Garden World in Orlando, Fla., recently began offering a Water Garden World-brand of koi food in his 3,000-square-foot showroom at his 2-acre facility.

Chesler notes he's able to offer customers a much lower price for an item they can't get elsewhere. He also enjoys a wider margin on the private-label food.

Pass the Cranberries

Jane Warner of the Virginia Berry Farm in Ruther Glen, Va., suggests cranberry plants make an interesting bog plant choice for water gardeners.

Warner notes that the cranberry, one of three native American fruits, are named after its crane-like red flower.

From the berry specialist's wholesale catalog:

Cranberries (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*): Easy to grow in moist acidic soil, this native evergreen is attractive and productive. Although it is not necessary to grow them under water, they are suitable for wet or marginal areas, but will perform equally well in a properly prepared garden bed, around your water garden or even in a hanging basket. Our varieties are hardy in zones 3-7. Adaptable to zone 2 with winter protection to prevent dessication of exposed foliage.

For more information, call the Virginia Berry Farm at (804) 448-4430.

Water Garden News seeks your ideas on building water-garden businesses — whether it be better retailing, installation and design tips, how to retain and motivate employees, or how to market your business. We'll pay \$50 for published submissions. Please send your ideas (50-200 words) and photos if appropriate to: Idea Exchange, Water Garden News, 3 Burroughs, Irvine, CA 92618; fax (949) 855-3045, or e-mail bhutchins@fancypubs.com. Water Garden News cannot take responsibility for return of materials.

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