

Merchandise the Pond Experience

Friday, May 28, 2010, 3:40 p.m. EDT

The Testosterone House is where we stock the nuts and bolts of pond equipment. It is marketed toward the no-nonsense customer. (Courtesy of Trevor Cole) We try to display products as they are intended to be used and help customers imagine recreating the ambience at home. (Courtesy of Trevor Cole) We jokingly call the enclosed pole barn that houses our fish and pond products the Testosterone House. Try as we may, there is nothing 'sexy' about stocking the nuts and bolts of pond equipment. Pumps, skimmers and nets are stacked warehouse style, marketed toward the no-nonsense customer.

The rest of our store, however, is merchandised with a more leisurely customer in mind. Our displays change frequently and we try to be creative with what we offer. Not just with 'foo-foo' garden gifts but with everything. We take our cue from nature, making an effort to appeal to all the senses with color, texture and setting.

Whenever possible, we display products the way they are designed to be used. We remove most products from the box because stuff in a box does not sell. Customers need to see it, touch it, hear it, smell it and taste it. For candles, we light one. Got chimes? Put a fan on them where they can be heard. For t-shirts, we hang them from a clothes line. Taste? We put out samples of our dips and sauces near the cash register. We run several DVDs as 'shelf talkers,' to demonstrate products from Squirrel Busters to hummingbird feeders to insect repellent/pesticide applicators. I am always on the lookout for new ideas.

As a pond and water garden retailers, you are selling a lifestyle. Fountains must be running. Outdoor fireplaces must be burning. Grills must be cooking. Wall art must be hung and spotlighted. Pottery must be planted with colorful annuals. Customers need to be able to imagine recreating this ambience at home.

Many shoppers are visual. For our bulk materials, we display a small sampling of the rocks, mulch, soil, sands and gravels in foil cooking trays lined neatly on a shelf. For the customer, it is like picking a carpet sample. Our paver display features a long retaining wall made up of different types and colors of segmental wall stones along with a pathway of various styles of pavers and patterns.

One of the most important elements for shopping is that customers need to feel the experience. Our most compelling interactive display is feeding the fish. It sells ponds, fish and atmosphere. Merchandising does not have to actually sell a single product; sell the experience through merchandising.