

Kiss My Aster

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Future Business Model: Kids Getting Dirty

Amanda Thomsen



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I chuckle when I hear adults say they don't like children, although I was one of them until I had a kid. Now I love kids and reserve my serious side eye for badly behaved grownups; after all, kids don't know any better and adults lack that excuse.

Sure, kids are loud, unpredictable and tend to make repetitive noises (over and over and over), but they're also really cute, funny and it costs \$233,610* a year to raise one and I'm thinking the garden center industry could use a little chunk of that figure if we could just see those little whippersnappers as customers (and also future customers).

First off, if you're focused on noticing the bad behavior of kids, it becomes a blinding strobe light and you'll miss all the good that children bring. There isn't a demographic that loves dirt, insects, flowers and outdoor living MORE than children. Do they break and stomp on things? Yes. We all sell untreatable

resin pots and plants that can take a lickin'. Do they scream when they're happy, sad or anything in between? Yes. Selling perennial grasses and shrubs that provide not only privacy, but also a sound baffle sounds like a profitable and downright neighborly thing to do.

Second, and this is where I'm at in life, people hate kids so much out there that I'm looking for places where me and my little ragamuffin are welcome. I'm looking for kid-friendly places all the time. We want to feel welcome. By advertising your business as inclusive to younger humans, you're ultimately welcoming moms and other parents. If you hold a planting party for adults, you may have a handful of people show up, but if you have a planting party for kids—word will travel like wildfire. You'll have Facebook mom groups doing your advertising work for you.

Kids between the ages of 5 to 8 rack up about three hours DAILY in screen time and parents are looking for ways to change that. Wouldn't it be clever for independent garden centers to advertise themselves as the place to buy the antidote to these plugged-in childhoods? Children spend half as much time playing outdoors as their parents did. As an industry, we've seen the pressure to provide "outdoor living" as much as just plants—doesn't this slide into that category? We can help provide the answers for parents that want to make changes.

As a person, parent and horticulturist, I really wanted to do something about it. I spent my whole childhood outdoors learning about nature, victory gardening, how to raise and lower the roof vents in a greenhouse and the many, many

different things one could do with play sand, and I wanted that for Hazel, too. So I wrote a book about it: *Backyard Adventure: Get Messy, Get Wet, Build Cool Things, and Have Tons of Wild Fun! 51 Free Play Activities* (Storey Publishing April 2019).

I've spent years working on this book (the photoshoots nearly killed me) and I want you to know that getting kids outside has the potential to be an industry of its own. It's not like when we were kids and we just existed outdoors without any kind of material assistance; we are so far from that now that things must be purchased! We, as garden centers, can be selling adventure, privacy, sound-proofing, wonder, nature-exploration and most of all, old-fashioned outdoor fun.

But first, you have to like them.

Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author. Her blog is planted at KissMyAster.com and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.