

Features

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The Cannabis Corner

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As medical and recreational marijuana becomes legal in certain states, some garden centers are considering carrying related products. We asked the co-owner of Scenic Roots about the Cannabis Corner and how it got started.

At this year's IGC Show in Chicago, there was a real, live cannabis plant in one of the booths (it was in the A Pot for Pot booth). That got us thinking and talking about what the potential is for cannabis at the garden retail level. Now, before I go any further, the rules and regulations vary by state, so always check your local laws before you go any further.

With that warning out of the way, I contacted Donna Kutil Ross, the co-owner of Scenic Roots, a garden center in East Sandwich, Massachusetts. They're pretty open about carrying products related to cannabis, and I wanted to get the scoop from her on how they got into it and what they carry. They actually started carrying FoxFarm potting soil (the gateway product), along with some fertilizers and new additions like 10-gallon pots about six years ago at the request of customers who became very loyal to her store. So when recreational became legal in Massachusetts, they had a choice to make. Here's the rest of the story.



Jen Polanz: Why did you decide to include cannabis products as a category for the garden center?

Donna Kutil Ross: When it became legal we chatted with each other, my brother and I and my other partner. We are on Cape Cod in Sandwich, which is the oldest town in Cape Cod. We're not in a city ... it's a big summer community. We said, 'Well, we're certainly not going to hang a flag with a marijuana leaf on it outside, but let's designate a 4-ft. section of fertilizers, bug control, fungus controls, all the soils and all the pots.' We just started with that and decided to put it on our website. Okay, let's be the first ones, let's at least let people know where they can get certain things.

JP: How did you get the word out?

DKR: It became legal last year, and we decided we were going to grow our own out here in a pot and showcase it on our Facebook and Instagram about the growing process to let them know what problems they could run into, like seed starting, transplanting, fertilizing, trimming and then drying. We did all of this on social media and then the outpouring of customers saying we're so glad you're doing this, we're so glad you're open about it. It's customers

we've had for decades that are coming to us and asking us questions. It's been easy, honestly. We haven't had any negative feedback.

JP: How do customers get the plants?

DKR: We cannot sell the plants. They do buy them online. We have one expert on our staff—she's our resident expert. She knows everything from prop'ing (propagation), harvesting, light spectrums and all that stuff. Last fall we took our whole staff to a day-long workshop someone gave on cannabis growing. All our staff was informed, but for basic questions. That way, if people came in with questions, we were able to do that.

JP: What are the most common questions you receive about this category?

DKR: When to harvest is a big one. And then it's maybe my plants are too small. Mostly you find out they're not getting enough light. They start them indoors and they're not providing enough length of light. Where they're supposed to have 12 to 14 hours and have them under a lamp for eight hours—they're mimicking the sunrise-sunset. We find a lot of people's plants are smaller than they should be and then when they put them outside they're leggy because now they're getting more direct sunlight. When do I know to harvest is when they're turning amber. Some people will bring in their plants. I'm telling you, they're not shy anymore. When they know your staff is open to it and you can handle questions, they will sit here for a half hour and talk to us.

JP: How did you establish this category in the garden center?

DKR: It's all about from the seeding starting to the soil to the pots to the next stage of soil when you transplant. Seed-starting soil: that's a huge category, whether they're doing it in peat pots or little 4-in. pots to start. Then the next soil is the Ocean Forest or Happy Frog FoxFarm or Stonington Growers Blend from Coast of Maine; they provide nutrients—that's extremely important to carry. You can have them in two different sections, too. We have the cannabis section, then we have Neptune's Harvest and Foxfarm in our regular houseplant and annuals section.

JP: What are some areas to consider for other retailers looking to do the same?

DKR: Other people can carry lights, dehumidifiers, fans. We decided to focus on the seasonal outdoor growing. They can grow three plants per person in your household, up to six here. It's like basil; it hates the cold, so it's not going out before Memorial Day and they have to harvest by October. We tailor more to the homeowners and the recreational growers.

JP: How have you seen the sales in this category going?

DKR: We've seen a huge increase in home growers—we've been selling a lot of fertilizer and a lot of soil. You know when it's transplant time, too, because there's a huge uptick in pots. Just the fact that the conversations have increased tenfold has helped. I think it has improved our business in a community sense and that's more important to us. It's not a huge amount of increase in sales. Some, yes. But in terms of the community aspect and relations, that has increased tremendously and that is more important to us.

JP: Do you have any other advice for retailers looking to enter this category?

DKR: I think if garden centers are looking to get into it, education is the first thing. A lot of businesses will go into something to make money, but they won't follow through. Do a little research and make sure you can answer questions. That was the most important thing, to be comfortable with it. **GP**

More Resources

Here's a list of what Scenic Roots carries in the Cannabis Corner (and you can add grow lights, dehumidifiers and fans, too):

Grow pots

10-gallon pots

Peat pellets

Seed starter

Heat mats

Starter trays, domes, pots

Fungus and bug controls

Earthworm castings

FoxFarm soils and liquid fertilizers

Coast of Maine soils and fertilizers

Neptune's Harvest