

## Columns

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### What Not to Wear

*Amanda Thomsen*



I am interested in fashion. You may not know it to look at me, but clothes are my first and true love. It's just that clothes don't always fit (causing anxiety and shame) and plants are one-size-fits-all (feeling good about myself and everyone else). At that realization, I started dressing like the fanciest dirt ball you know and I delved into the world of plants. I've barely come up for air since then.

So where does that put me on questions of employee dress code/uniform? I'm here to destroy all uniforms and dress codes in a stomp of my Birkenstocked foot. I totally understand that companies provide their employees with uniforms for a few reasons.

Employees will get dirty. Well, if you're hiring gardeners anyways, aren't they used to that? Don't they already have gardening clothes that work for them and may help them do their work more easily? They know what tan lines, what weight of shirt, what length of sleeve works best for them ... why not let them? At one store I was issued five shirts a year made of heavy, deluxe cotton that nearly suffocated me long before August. Another place gave each employee \$25 for clothes for trashing at the garden center. That unnecessary money bought me 10 T-shirts from the thrift store AND a 6-pack of beer. I still have and wear those T-shirts 10 years later. The beers have long since departed this world.

Visibility. Unless your shirts are a vile, fluorescent neon color, this simply isn't true. Customers don't notice things like that. If you dress each of your people in a giant, fuzzy Dalmatian costume, they might notice. The fact is, your people can be nude (that's not OSHA approved), but if they aren't available and helpful, none of it matters. I made a deal with one garden center that I would not wear their company polo shirts, but I would be the most helpful little berserker in the crew. I think I held up my part of the bargain. I think it's a hoot that IKEA's employees have an embroidered logo on their back, over their right shoulders. It actually makes sense. I always thought garden center T-shirts should have the employees name in bold, their department and their favorite plant. So, mine would say "AMANDA—PERENNIALS—NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS" (totally kidding).

Ensuring a standard. You give your employees shirts so that they don't look like they just rolled out of bed/slept on a public bus\*/show any flair. Okay, if you're hiring people and you seriously doubt their ability to dress themselves, GAME OVER. I know for certain that some customers have made a beeline to get me to help them because they enjoy my kooky, stylish way of dressing. I'm showing them that I'm creative and individual; the custies who want that are looking for a sign. Don't take it away.

Safety. Are your employees wearing shoes? Yes? Are they flip-flops? No? Then you're pretty much golden.

Hey, I understand that providing clothing to your staff is expensive and time consuming. I just don't get the "why." I mean, what does it matter what we look like when we're wearing work gloves that smell like dead mammals? I'd love to see you pocket that change, buy the staff some pizzas and let their personal style and individuality shine.

\*I do regret wearing a vintage T-shirt for a tourist bar to work at a garden center one day when I was in my 20s. It was too hot for anything else, as this old shirt was thin and breathable. I mostly worked in the backstock area and I was beginning to suffer from heat stroke. I had lost 20 pounds in about 2 weeks and ... I'm still sorry I wore the shirt. (I also still have the shirt.) **GP**

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*Amanda Thomsen is now a regular columnist in Green Profit magazine. You can find her funky, punky blog planted at [KissMyAster.co](http://KissMyAster.co) and you can follow her on Facebook and Twitter @KissMyAster.*