

Features

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“Put It With the Product”

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When looking for a source for this story, we thought about the IGC that our two Cleveland-based editors are closest to—Petitti Garden Centers. They couldn't help but notice the stacks and stacks of bagged potting mixes that Petitti's sells through every season.

Curious if there were any secrets to success with this oft-ignored category, we sat down (figuratively, over the phone) with AJ Petitti, president of the nine-store, family-owned business to learn how they approach the category.

First, some proof we selected the right IGC as a source: 200,000 units and \$2.7 million in net sales in 2021 from 35 SKUs—mixes are obviously a serious category for Petitti's! Brands they carry include Espoma, Michigan Peat, Scotts/Miracle Gro and Sun Bulb, plus their own house-labeled brand.

The first key to those kinds of numbers is an obvious one: product placement.

“It's got to be in high-traffic areas,” he says. “If you're just leaving it up front by the register in a pickup area, you're missing a lot of opportunity.”

Pictured: At the Mentor, Ohio, Petitti Garden Center location soils are situated in multiple locations, including next to the pottery and houseplants area (pictured here). Customers also can find soils just outside the doors that lead to the greenhouse, as well as inside on the way to the registers.

Petitti's highest-traffic area, and hence home to most of their bagged mixes, is alongside their store racetrack, on the return back inside from the outdoor annuals area. It's also adjacent to the pottery department. And fertilizers are there, too—“Pretty much everything that you would want to cross-merchandise it with,” says AJ.



Cross-merchandising is another obvious key. But there are opportunities for cross-merchandising that you might not be taking advantage of. At Petitti's, for instance, they display some appropriate mixes in their nursery and perennials departments as well as in the main soils area. Yes, it's more work to stock products in multiple locations, but it's both a convenience and a reminder to your customers.

Specialty mixes are easy to cross-merchandise—put the cactus mix with the cacti and succulents, the orchid mix with the orchids, the vegetable mix with the

vegetables. In fact, cross-merchandising these is so important, AJ suggests, “If you have to pick one or the other, I'd put it with the product—that's where your audience is.”

The next tip from AJ is about why customers should be buying mixes (soil amendments, too).

“Without good soil or without amending soil, you're really not going to be successful as a gardener,” he says. “For us, it really is just being good stewards, making sure our customers are going to be successful.”



To that end, Petitti's reinforces the importance of good garden soil and potting mixes at every opportunity—on plant tags, on the backs of soil bags, in signage, on the T-shirts of team members, when training new employees, during radio and television appearances, in YouTube videos ... “Every bit of education goes back to the importance of amending your soil, the importance of having a good foundation for planting,” AJ emphasizes.

Starting this year, Petitti's is using technology to help even more customers be success (and maybe sell some more mix in the process): They'll be posting QR codes throughout the business, some of which will answer common questions customers have about soils and amendments.

“I had lunch out today. And restaurants are done printing menus. Instead, you scan a QR code and pull up a menu online. I think that's pretty mainstream, pretty much across the board.” AJ says much of the

information is already on their website; they just need to link it to a QR code.

“Especially with young families and new gardeners, the number one thing we've determined for our success is their success,” AJ concludes. “And if they're not amending soils, they're not going to be successful—it's as simple as that.” **GP**