

Cover Story

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Providing Structure in The Garden

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We don't often talk about the pieces that help gardeners achieve their perfect spaces, like trellises, shepherd's hooks, hanging basket brackets, obelisks, arbors, gazebos and other structural products. But these are integral to getting customers the look they want, whether it's to display climbing roses, accentuate a beautiful entryway, place hanging baskets near a patio or to hold lanterns that are lighting up the garden in the evening.

"While these products are very functional, consumers are looking for style and color to add to the overall 'look' of their environment," said Gary Raines, vice president of sales and marketing at American GardenWorks, an Indiana-based company that makes all their products in the U.S. "Also, more and more people are using obelisks and plant stands indoors, so style and size is important.

"Younger gardeners may only have a small patio or balcony and are looking for items that fit, as well as style."

Pictured: The Tall Double Shepherd Hook with Spiral Twist, made with 100% U.S. steel and powder coated for durability from American GardenWorks.

These type of products have lasting power in the garden, too, says Andrew Kardonski of Austram, which has been making structural garden pieces for more than 40 years.

"I consider these items a timeless addition to one's home and garden, as the function never changes," he notes. "Typically, an arbor or shepherd's hook will not go out of style—as we have been selling the same Vintage Arbor for over 20 years. We have noticed that people are really looking for a solid product that will last."

That means it doesn't just have to be sturdy enough to hold vines and/or blooms, it needs to have a long-lasting splendor in the garden, too. There's no more utility over beauty: it has to have both.

Displaying Structural Items

After touring garden centers for nearly two decades, I've seen how challenging it can be to display these products. If they don't come with a display stand, it's difficult to figure out where to put shepherd's hooks and trellises.

"Many of our retailer customers merchandise arbors, trellises, shepherd's hooks and fences as a product category,

and use them in boutique displays or feature them with the plants that they support,” says Beth Lorentz, marketing and product director for Glenhaven Home & Holiday. “Also, retailers encourage cross-selling when they use them in their potted container gardens and display them in or next to their outdoor containers.”

And Beth notes that you shouldn't just think about their function related to plants when merchandising them. Consumers use them in lots of different ways.

“For example, trellises and bamboo fences can be used to divide a space or create privacy,” she adds. “Or shepherd's hooks can be used to not only display hanging plants, but wind chimes, bird feeders and waterers, bug zappers, display signs, solar or candle lanterns, bud vases, as well as pretty much anything that your gardening mind can imagine.”



That means the potential to cross-merchandise with indoor products and even holiday items, too.

“Plant supports can be merchandised and sold during the non-gardening season, too,” she says. “For example, display obelisks with LED lights and shatterproof ornaments for the holiday season or use arbors to showcase Christmas ornaments or lighted spheres.”

Pictured: This obelisk is one of many styles and sizes available, all with a durable powder-coated finish, from Glenhaven Home & Holiday.

American GardenWorks offers small footprint metal displays to use with its shepherd's hooks and trellises so retailers can keep them organized and contained.

“On the practical side, these displays hold a significant quantity of product and ‘showcase’ the products,” Gary said. “They are visible to the consumer

and can be easily used to merchandise product adjacent to plants, pots and accessory items such as lanterns, windchimes or bird feeders.”

Andrew says the best way to display arbors is to showcase their function at the store, creating transitions from one section to another.

“That way, the customer can get a real feel for it, touch it and get a visual image,” he says. “Arbors are great ways to connect spaces in your home. Whether it is to connect the front and backyard or act as a greeting entrance to garden/store visitors, they can totally change the feeling of an outdoor space.”

Availability for Products

Of course, availability is always top of mind (or at least it has been in the last two years), so I asked about that. Gary says his company believes there will be continued supply chain pressure into 2023, but having their production in the U.S. does help ensure a smoother source of supply.

For Glenhaven, container ship pileups at ports in both Asia and in the U.S. continue to increase transit time. Fortunately, the company is well equipped to help retailers with its buy-early, ship-early strategy. Andrew says Austram, too, is focused on anticipating delays by ordering early. He also notes that they're seeing greater demand for trellises and arbors, and will have new introductions in those lines coming soon.

It sounds like early ordering is going to be the key for a LOT of product segments through 2023, so if there's something you really want to carry next year, make a plan to jump on ordering it soon.

More Than a Hobby

Gardeners have gotten serious about their love affair with plants, which in turn has impacted the hobby greenhouse market.

“The hobby greenhouse market has been pretty stable for quite some time,” said Michelle Moore, owner of Adapt8, which makes the Solexx brand of hobby greenhouses (also made in the USA). “With the pandemic it was really interesting. They had a lot of time and they could see where there were shortages, so food was high on people’s lists.”

In the past, they saw lots of demand for small, potting-shed-like greenhouses in an 8-ft. by 8-ft. size. Now, though, consumers are looking more toward larger greenhouses, like 8-ft. by 16-ft. or even 16-ft. by 20-ft. So how can you help your customers with the greenhouse of their dreams?

The first step is to have one on display. They want to be able to walk in it, check it out and “kick the tires,” so to speak. Michelle also has a psychology tip—install doors on both ends of the greenhouse for displays. People want to be able to leave easily if someone else ventures in and they’re more likely to walk in if they have an egress.

She also recommends offering installation.

“That’s an add-on service that can be really profitable,” she adds. “Once they have experience building a display unit, the second one’s even easier. And the fifth one becomes pretty fast.”



Pictured: The Solexx Garden Master model of hobby greenhouse from Adapt8 has a heavy-duty frame with more headroom, as well as built-in benches and hanging rods.

Display depends on the garden center, but she’s seen successful retailers place them in a visible location filled with beautiful plants. In fact, the hobby greenhouse can serve as merchandising vehicle along with a sales function.

“If you have varying stages of plants, you can show, ‘If you had a greenhouse you could be doing this right

now,’” Michelle says.

As with any highly specialized product segment, you need someone to “own it.” Someone who understands the products and can speak about them to customers. Knowledge like placement, maintenance and upkeep can help customers be successful with such a large purchase.

Greenhouse sales can also result in additional plant sales in shoulder seasons where outdoor plants may not make it. Michelle says she’s found hobby greenhouse owners not only buy more plants, but are more knowledgeable and more willing to take chances with their purchases.

“They have a longer cycle to get it right,” she says. “They buy on the shoulders of the season. They’re the people you can ‘wake up’ earlier in the season and get them coming in.”

Oh, and one last thing—Michelle says she has seen the hobby greenhouse buyer skew younger since the pandemic began, so this product segment has a wider audience than it used to. **GP**