

Features

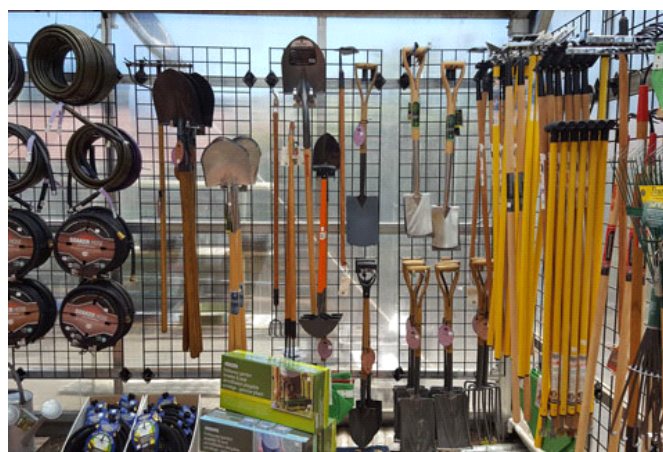
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Must-Have Tools for Garden Retail

Jennifer Polanz

Gardeners become very partial to the tools that work for them (or get equally frustrated when their tools fail them). As we build more fans of gardening who keep coming back for more, we have to help them become more successful by offering the tools they need to continue to grow their hobby (pun totally intended). That can also mean offering tools that are higher quality that will last longer and showing them why those tools will last.

Pictured: An example of a long-handled tools display at Cornell Farms in Portland, Oregon.



There are lots of tools out there and offering a good/better/best strategy can help you show customers that they have those options, says Ron Greening, director of marketing and sales at Dramm.

“Customers are looking for quality, durability and performance,” he adds. “It’s imperative to us to make you understand the quality when you take it home.”

You can help customers find those higher quality items by showcasing how they stack up with others, and highlight the key components that show why those better/best items may last longer and be the better option.

Giving Customers a Hand

There are a couple of key areas you can focus in on that will help your customers and improve your average ticket sales by creating add-on opportunities at the register. For example, I talked to Chris Sabbarese, digital marketing and communications manager at Corona Tools, about some of the opportunities for additional sales with hand tools.

One such opportunity focuses on highlighting the ease of use and comfort of tools like the ComfortGEL grip on many of Corona’s offerings. They’re designed to help gardeners who may have problems with dexterity in their hands, as well as for gardeners who are using the tools for long periods of time. The extra effort with tools featuring ergonomic designs can make gardeners more comfortable and successful in their hobby, keeping them involved for longer.



He notes these hand tools can be great options for impulse purchases at the counter and they even offer smaller counter displays with a variety of different tool options. They also have bonus packs in a larger stand-up display that pair the pruner with a sheath and a sharpener.

Let's talk about that sharpener for a minute, too. Customers want their tools to last for a long time, and they can, but they do get dull. The sharpener is an add-on sale that will let customers stay successful with their purchase for a long time. The key is communicating the importance of the sharpener, which can be done by directing customers to videos like one on Corona Tools' YouTube page about the importance of tool maintenance.

"Most people aren't necessarily aware of the best ways to care for them," Chris says, adding retailers can make QR codes that send customers to resources like Corona's Principles of Pruning and Principles of Planting. "This is a great opportunity to talk about the sharpening aspect. It just helps to educate them."

Pictured: The ComfortGEL Anvil Pruner in ¾-in. size from Corona Tools.

Another aspect of customer education with hand tools that doesn't get talked about a lot is hand size in relation to the size of the tool. It's important to purchase a pruner with the right cutting capacity based on the size of your hand, Chris says, and the smaller the hand, the smaller the tool should be.

"Knowing the proper tool you need is going to provide a much better experience," he notes.

Signage highlighting this can be effective, as can making sure sales staff have a good idea of how to match tools to a customer's hand.

All About the Water

The other segment of tools that customers are constantly looking for is watering and irrigation tools. These are some of the most common needs retailers can fill and Ron at Dramm says there are a couple of ways to goose sales in this area.

For starters, the array of options is key. There are a couple of basic offerings you should have, including a spray gun that's utilitarian (think hosing off the deck, shampooing the dog, cleaning the windows and watering the flowers), sprinklers for the lawn and water wands for more precise watering (the preferred method for watering flowers).

He equates these options to the plier, hammer and screwdriver basics that every hardware store carries. You can get more specialized, though, by homing in on what gardeners really need. There are options for all aspects of gardening. For example, if a customer is starting seed, he says, they need a nozzle with fine mist and very little pressure, emitting a smaller droplet size.

"As a garden center, you judge your clientele by that," he says of their gardening goals. "If you have a lot of sophisticated gardeners, you want to carry some of those specialized tools."

In fact, Ron says a lot of times they sell more of their higher-priced, high-quality niche items online because they're not often carried in brick-and-mortar stores.

"Specialty nozzles should be looked at by garden centers and retailers in general," he adds. "If you're servicing people who are involved in gardening—and in some cases very involved—they are looking for specialty items."

People go into independent garden centers for different reasons and one is to find specialty items they can't find at boxes."

Again, another component to increased tool sales is calling out the benefits and special attributes of the better/best options. For example, Ron notes the one-touch thumb control on certain models, like the 30-in. RainSelect Rain Wand, which prevents hand fatigue. These are the comforts that help gardeners continue to be successful.



Pictured: The Sharpening Tool from Corona Tools.

Another major component to watering tools, just like hand tools, is the merchandising. Dramm makes a major effort to make their tools stand out at retail, from the six bright colors used for the tools to the off-the-pegboard, stand-alone displays offered. Why? They worked with Dr. Bridget Behe at Michigan State University (who's eye-tracking display research is also in this issue on page 26) to determine what catches a customer's eye. Her research found customers were more attracted to displays that had all six

colors in them versus an assortment that just had one or two colors.

"The amount of visual attraction plummets dramatically," Ron says. "It really makes a big difference; all the colors draw your eye."

He also notes that because you read left to right, they found through the eye-tracking research that the best place to put one of the colorful displays is to the left-hand side of a bench of annuals in full color.

"We've got the heat maps to show where people are looking," Ron adds. "If they put it in the middle it's not as closely looked at; on the right they see more of the plants versus the wands."

And you may be wondering, as I was, what color customers liked best. Ron says it depends on where you are regionally, but nationally the No. 1 best seller is Berry.

"Color does influence the sale," Ron says. "Whether it's male or female, doesn't matter the demographic, it will influence the sale."

Outfitting Employees

How do you outfit employees with the tools they need? Kate Terrell, owner and president of Wallace's Garden Center in Bettendorf, Iowa, gave us the rundown on how they do it.

"We give everyone one to two company shirts when they are hired," she says. "The rest of their uniforms are sold to them at 'cost,' which is not too expensive, as all our shirts are embroidered or screen printed as a work program at our local Handicapped Development Center."

They recently implemented an Employee of the Month program, too, which scores the winner another free work shirt, as well as a store gift card and coupon for 50% off any purchase in the store. Greenhouse workers received Slogger boots this year, too.

All employees can choose from a supply of tools like pruners, knives, etc. or they can purchase their own with the employee discount. She says most prefer to get their own. They can also buy gloves at 50% off.

Kate says the company supplies items like bug spray and sunscreen, as well as company hats (baseball hats in the summer and stocking hats in winter). They also keep a stash of raincoats and rain pants available, too.

Some managers have contracts with a uniform allowance that allows them to purchase things like steel-toe

workboots, coveralls, rain gear or extra uniforms since they work more days. **GP**