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Four Theme Gardens for 2023

Danielle Ernest

After interviewing Diane Blazek, Executive Director of the National Gardening Bureau, there are four main themes—Goth Gardening, Kid’s Gardening, Storybook Gardening and Culinary Gardening—that she sees emerging as popular for the coming 2023 retail gardening season. Let’s explore some strategies for each.



Goth Gardening

The latest trend is gothic gardening, which is full of high-contrasting blooms and foliage that cause drama in the garden. Wrought and cast-iron gates, stone accents and antique urns give off an Addams Family vibe to the outdoor space. With the plethora of black foliage and flowering plants being introduced, this is a match made for the ages.

Pictured: Just one Goth-themed example is the Garden Party Starry Night combo from Dümmen Orange, which features Parfum d’Ethiopia Artemisia,

EmpressFlair White Verbena, Star Dust White Flash Chamaesyce and Sweetunia Black Satin Petunia.

The Display: To create a goth gardening display, add plants like Harry Lauder Walking Stick, Ninebark Wine Black, Hardy Hibiscus Holy Grail, Crape Myrtle Shadow Magic, Sedum Back in Black, Astilbe Dark Side of the Moon, Mangave Black Magic, Colocasia Black Swan, Baptisia Dark Chocolate, Begonia Ninetta, Celosia Dracula, Viola Sorbet Black Delight and Ornamental Pepper Black Pearl.

Hardscape items can include wrought- and cast-iron elements, stone fountains or statues, antique-looking urns, stained glass panes and animal sculptures like crows or rats. Look at pictures of the American Gothic décor and design to see exactly the theme that you’re aiming for. Include books that are focused on black plants or Gothic design such as “Black Plants” by Paul Bonine. Close to the display have plant information sheets and signage to highlight the theme of the display for customers.

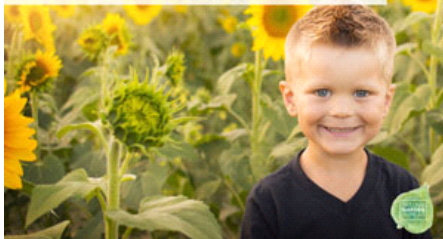
Class Ideas: Select five to 10 different plants and teach a class on “Intro to Goth Plants.” Have your landscaping section of your retail garden center or a local landscape architect teach a class regarding the elements of design drawing inspiration from American Gothic period books and movies.

Have an “American Gothic Theme Party” where customers create small container gardens with different plants

such as Canna Lily Cannova Bronze Scarlet, Ornamental Pepper Onyx Red and Petunia Trilogy Silver Blotch or a combination that your in-house design staff selects from your inventory. Have Paul out to your garden center as a guest speaker and to sign his books. Always provide guest speakers with the products that you have inventory on so that only available plants can be showcased.



HOW TO PLANT A SUNFLOWER HOUSE



Kid's Gardening

A theme that has kids in mind is always going to be a surefire way to get their parents into your garden center, especially if there's a class surrounding that theme. Take for instance sunflowers—like a class to teach children and parents “How to Create a Sunflower House.” In addition to that, have a display in the garden center that focuses on that same item.

Pictured: An example of a Pinterest promotion for How to Build a Sunflower House.

The Display: Include all the components needed to build a sunflower house, such as seeds for different sunflower varieties, a range of potted varieties of sunflowers showcasing different colors and heights, written directions for building a sunflower house, soil that customers may need to amend the ground and organic fertilizers. Some sunflower options are: American Giant, Mammoth Grey Stripe, Autumn Beauty, Chocolate Cherry, Shock-O-Lat, Helios Flame, Moulin Rouge, Domino and Goldy Honey. These varieties would provide customers with a variety in color and height.

Class Ideas: You can have moms and kids come in to teach them how to plant sunflower seeds—how deep the seeds should be planted, how often they should be watered, what type of soil and sun requirements are needed. Let the kids plant the seeds in pots themselves. Provide sunflower seeds for snacks and keep the length of the class to a short amount of time so the kids will remain interested. Small terracotta pots could also be provided to paint prior to planting. Have a fee for the class to cover overhead, but reasonable enough for moms on a budget. Provide parents with the steps of how to create a sunflower house. If possible, it would be great to have a sunflower house on the garden center grounds to show the participants in the class.

Storybook Gardens

Take a favorite storybook such as “The Tale of Peter Rabbit,” “Planting a Rainbow,” “Growing Vegetable Soup,” “Harry Potter,” “The Hungry Caterpillar,” “Too Many Tomatoes” or a popular book that recently came out and create an entire event centered around this book. Work with the local library to pick a book and promote together so that communication is going out to both mailing lists. Talk with your local botanical garden, as several have storybook-themed children's gardens. Time the event around the author's birthday or the anniversary of the book being printed. Peter Rabbit just celebrated its 120th anniversary and the author Beatrix Potter's birthday is July 28.

The Display: Take for instance, “The Tale of Peter Rabbit”—hardscaping items for the display could contain a rusted gate, wheelbarrow, watering can, rake, trellis, blue jacket with bronze buttons, teacup and teaspoon, rabbit statue, and copies of the book beside the display. Plants that could be included are lettuce, radishes, French beans, parsley, cabbages, peas, cucumbers, potatoes, onions, gooseberry bushes and black current bushes. Signage for the display would help the customer put it all together. A large poster of the book cover and then some quotes from the book such as “First, he ate some lettuces and some French beans; and then he ate some radishes; and then, feeling rather sick, he went to look for some parsley.” ~Beatrix Potter, “The Tale of Peter Rabbit”.

Class Ideas: In conjunction with the display, hold a class to teach parents and children about growing vegetables.

Pick five vegetables from the book and focus on those. Picking seeds like beans and peas that little fingers can easily handle would be most beneficial for young gardeners. Have all the elements that you sell in your vegetable area there for purchase—cell packs, potting soil, organic fertilizer, seeds, kids watering cans, kids gardening gloves, etc. Keep the time of the class to 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the age group and their concentration level. In addition, snacks are always welcome at kid's events, so have homegrown veggies there for attendees to snack on, ultimately showing them how much better they taste than store bought.



Culinary Gardens

Who doesn't like pizza or chips and salsa? Did you know that they share the same month for promotion— May. May 19 is National Pizza Day and the entire month of May is National Salsa Month. Dedicate the month of May on your promotional calendar to culinary gardens. Work with local chefs to come in and hold classes and create delicious appetizers, especially chefs that believe that homegrown veggies are the best. If May is too busy for you, another idea is to have a pizza food truck in the parking lot. Maybe there's a local salsa maker who could set up a tent letting customers taste different flavors. Pulling in different vendors and companies will provide for maximum promotion of the event.

Pictured: The Season Me! Fusions line from Benary includes Dressed 'n Blessed, one of several boutique culinary herb mixes. This one includes sage, oregano and thyme. You can offer these as part of a class or on a bench with culinary theme promotions.

The Display: For your pizza garden display, include plants such as tomatoes with multiple varieties that would be best for making sauce, bell peppers, onions and herbs like chives, rosemary, basil, oregano and parsley. Place pizza cookbooks and growing information sheets for each variety that's in the display. Items that the gardener will need to be successful such as watering cans, organic fertilizers, shovels, gardening gloves can all be placed in the display. Show pictures in signage of an example of a pizza garden if there isn't enough room to highlight on the bench. Make sure all garden staff is up to date on the display and can answer all questions on how to create a pizza garden from customers.

Class Ideas: There are tons of different class ideas that could be done with this concept—it depends on your audience. With children, a class on creating a pizza or salsa garden could be taught. Each of these concepts could be done in a large container garden as well so that the participants have it to take home with them. Lack of time is one of the biggest reasons why any type of extracurricular activity like gardening isn't happening. If the time is reserved and all the elements to make a culinary garden are provided, then it's more likely to happen. Similar to "Sip 'n Paint" classes that are taking place across the country—why not "Sip 'n Plant" classes for adults to make a culinary garden and drink a glass of vino while they're doing it.

These four themes are fun and provide ways to draw in current and potentially future customers to your retail location. Try adding just one concept to your current promotions and see how it works for your establishment. **GP**

Danielle Ernest is a garden expert with more than a decade of experience working in the horticulture industry with giants like Proven Winners, Bonnie Plants, HGTV Plant Collection and more. She has been writing for and educating the gardening community since 2001.

The Key to Success: Promotion!

It's extremely important for the success of the class and the display that your customer is hearing from you on a basis that may feel like overcommunication. Communicate through your newsletter and post to social platforms multiple times. Create a specific event on Facebook so they continue seeing it. Parents are super busy and need to see the event information several times before signing up.

Work on a way to communicate events to potential customers as well. Work with local libraries and/or botanical gardens that have a vested interest in the event, and write them a description to include in their email newsletters and on their socials. Look for local moms groups on Facebook and organizations like MOPS or Mom2Mom and reach out to their board to ask for help with promotion for kids events. The Storybook theme could really be done on a monthly or bimonthly schedule and could be done with books for adults as well. Good luck!