

Cover Story

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Containers With a Story

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Those in the retail business wear many hats: buyer, merchandiser, customer service, sales and... storyteller?

Pictured: Ecopots from The Pots Company.

Customers often respond to products with a good story, whether that's talking about how it's made, where it comes from or what it's made of. If a customer can connect with a product's story, they'll continue to tell it after they bought it. Sustainability is one aspect garden retailers can really home in on, and here we'll take a look at some options and ways to frame the

conversation. This isn't a comprehensive list of sustainable options for containers, so be sure to look for more as you buy products.

Reducing Water Usage

Proven Winners introduced its AquaPots a number of years ago, and now there are new, lighter versions and inserts that can help customers be successful with container gardening while lightening the load (and the impact on the wallet).

I talked to Kate Spirgen, marketing specialist at Proven Winners, about the benefits of the AquaPots Lite and inserts that retailers could pass along. These were introduced in limited availability last year and have wider availability this

year.

“From an eco-friendly standpoint the inserts and the AquaPots Lite require 50% less soil and 75% less water on average than your typical container,” she said. “People who are in a drought area with a water allowance can have really beautiful containers while staying in their water allowance.”

Pictured: AquaPots Lite from Proven Winners.

The pots save money and time, and are a nice bonus for consumers who take vacations during the summer or who are newbies who forget to water, she added. There are multiple styles, sizes and shapes for the AquaPots Lite. However, the inserts can also be sold separately for those who would like to retrofit containers they already have. There’s a round version and square version, and they’re adaptable to different sizes of pots. ([Watch a video to learn more.](#))



Recycled Materials, Part 1

Last year at Cultivate’23 in Columbus, our editors came across the company IC3D, a 3D printing company that was showcasing a line of pots there. This company is continuing its foray into garden retail under the brand name Polly Planters and has a sustainability message that comes across on multiple fronts.

First, you have to learn a bit about 3D printing if you’re not familiar. I talked with Maria Caracciolo recently to get a better understanding of the process. The Columbus, Ohio-area manufacturer owns state-of-the-art 3D printers that use plastic filaments—in Polly Planters’ case, recycled PETG filament that gets recycled from post-industrial waste streams—to print the layers of the planters until it’s completed. IC3D, the manufacturer behind Polly Planters, has about 50 printers varying in size from desktop to 4-ft. cubes. They make their own recycled filament, too (sourced from a U.S. company), which means they can offer a variety of colors, sizes and shapes.



Pictured: Upcycle pots from Foliera.

Designs can be ordered from the catalog (there are several standard designs to choose from) or retailers can ask for custom designs if they have something in mind. Because they print on site, they can accommodate smaller batches and lead times tend to be about four to six weeks.

“We can offer something a little more sustainable, a little bit more personal. We can cater to their specific customer base. With 3D printing, we can make anything for anyone the way they want it,” Maria said, noting they work with garden retailers currently who do

both off-the-shelf and custom designs. “We had an experimental hunch that we could solve a lot of problems for retailers. In looking at things like lead time and availability of product, our hunch was that we could fill a gap.”

They’ve already renewed for Cultivate’24 and they’re excited to show new, larger sizes that retailers didn’t see last year. If you’d like to check out more before then, visit pollyplanters.com.

Recycled Materials, Part 2

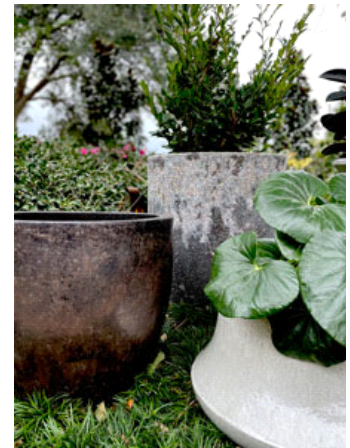
I was recently reminded of another company that offers a sustainability message with its pots. Belgian manufacturer The Pots Company (appropriately named) offers Ecopots, a collection of high-quality, durable containers from 80% post-consumer plastics combined with environmentally conscious components.

The company doesn't sacrifice style, though, when working to help the environment. The pot designs are clean, minimalist and timeless. They come in a variety of sizes, shapes and styles, with some self-watering and others on wheels or able to be mounted to a wall. All are UV- and frost-resistant. The Pot Company is committed to sustainability for its whole enterprise, too, as it's certified carbon-neutral and has earned several European certifications for sustainable operations. Here in the U.S., the company is represented by United Nursery in Homestead, Florida.

While at the TPIE show in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, our intrepid *buZZ!* newsletter editor Ellen Wells found another recycled container option in Foliera's new Upcycle line, made in India. It looks like glazed pottery, but it's actually metal reclaimed from junked cars.

Pictured: Pottery from Anamese.

Here's what she wrote in *buZZ!* about it: "The paint, which really does look like a glaze, is also environmentally friendly. Oh, I should mention these pots have a cork-stoppered drainage hole, too. I spotted three different colors—green, slate gray and black."



Consider What You May Already Carry

Ashley Goldman at Anamese noted that pottery like her company's is crafted from the Earth, and characterized by durability and longevity.

"When we say, 'made to last for generations,' it's not just a statement, it's our sincere commitment," she said.

That in itself can make pottery a sustainable choice, since it's not going into a waste stream. But, if it does have to for some reason, most of the clay can be recycled.

"In the event of breakage, the clay can be crushed and seamlessly reintegrated back into the Earth," she added.

"Our pottery warehouse proudly showcases some of the most colorful crushed driveway gravel, a testament to the cyclical and eco-friendly nature of our materials."



As you look at your offerings for 2024 and beyond, take a closer look at the stories you can tell and the options you can offer to customers looking for eco-friendly products.

Pictured: Polly Planter 3D-printed pots in the styles Venus, Kyra and Diana.

What's Trending for 2024?

Aside from talking about sustainability, I asked Ashley Goldman at Anamese what she's seeing trending for this year. She said color is making a comeback, as seen in clothing color palettes over the past couple of years, then home décor and now containers.

"There's a noticeable surge in the demand for metallic glazes, with Heavy Metal, Graphite and Luna taking the spotlight," she said. "Unglazed pottery

has been prominent over the last two to three years, but as people reintroduce luxury and color into their spaces, there's a quest for balanced neutrals to elevate the earthy tones.

"It's a dynamic fusion of trends—metallic glazes adding a touch of contemporary allure to the evolving landscape of pottery preferences." **GP**