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Features

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Rent, Return, Repeat

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Examples of events using plant rentals from Gardens of Babylon in Nashville.

How many times do you think Blockbuster rented out "The Little Mermaid" or "Ghostbusters" before those VHS tapes finally gave out? Probably hundreds. At roughly $4 a rental, that's about $1,200 of revenue from a $20 tape. Pretty good margin, right?

Now, I know the video store industry didn't exactly adapt fast enough—and went extinct because of it—but stick with me here. Think of plant rentals as the next evolutionary step for the retail garden center. After several boom years, many of us are now facing declining revenue, rising costs and shrinking profit.

Plant rentals offer one potential path to reverse that trend. Because what's better than selling a plant for $100? Selling the same plant multiple times. At Gardens of Babylon, we've turned this concept into a real business driver. In just over two years, we've added an entirely new revenue stream that has grown our top line, boosted profit and helped flatten out our seasonality.

In 2025 alone, we generated nearly $150,000 in plant rental revenue. When I share that with industry peers, I usually get a raised eyebrow—until I show them the math. Then the next question is always the same: "Is it worth the labor and the risk?" The answer is: It can be, if you do it right.

The Foundations of a Successful Plant Rental Program

There are several key factors that determine whether plant rentals will work for your business: location, clientele, product selection, pricing, sales approach and logistics.

Location matters: Plant rentals thrive in areas with strong event economies—affluent metropolitan regions with steady demand from corporate clients, weddings and conventions. Cities like Nashville, Chicago, Las Vegas, Orlando and New Orleans are ideal. Rural garden centers, unfortunately, just won't see enough demand to make it worthwhile. Sorry, Monowi, Nebraska (population: 1)—this one's not for you.

Choose the right plants: Your rental material should be durable, adaptable and able to handle low light, transport and the occasional bit of neglect. Lean on reliable foliage plants—sansevieria, ficus, schefflera and strelitzia are all winners. Avoid delicate bloomers like roses or peonies unless it's for a specific request at full retail. For example, one of our large corporate rentals requested 100 6-in. roses for table arrangements. We knew they wouldn't survive a second rental, so we charged full retail and added an easy $2,500 in revenue to the project.

Some of my favorites? Boston ferns—we've rented the same ones more than 15 times this year and they still look great. Over time, you'll learn which plants are your "Blockbuster hits."

Pricing: The Make-or-Break Factor

Getting your pricing structure right determines whether plant rentals feel rewarding or regrettable. At Gardens of Babylon, our rental minimum is around $2,000—a threshold that covers logistics, planning and labor while also weeding out "tire kickers" and setting a professional tone from the start.

When we do encounter budget push-back, we treat it as a sales pivot, inviting clients to visit our store and purchase a few plants outright instead. That way, no conversation is a waste.

Our rentals have ranged from $2,000 to $58,000 and the key to consistency is packaging. Offering tiered pricing—with clear inclusions for delivery, staging and pickup—helps clients make decisions faster. Every company will have its own approach, but whatever you choose, apply it consistently.

Some operations use simple formulas like $100 per plant (regardless of size) or 50% of retail value with a minimum threshold. We use a hybrid model: Fixed pricing for our standard packages and a per-plant structure for larger, more customized rentals. Adding decorative pottery or other custom touches adds labor and increases the total price.

Likewise, we charge a $400 after-hours pickup fee for any retrievals before 8:00 a.m. or after 5:00 p.m.—a policy most clients understand and happily accept. Others simply coordinate with their venue for pickup the following morning.

Selling Rentals the Right Way

Plant rentals might not require the same design finesse as a full-scale landscape installation, but professionalism and process still matter.

Approach each inquiry systematically:

- Research the client and understand their vision
- Come prepared with visuals or collateral

Be transparent about timelines, pricing and expectations. Leverage technology to build trust early. Tools like Zoom or Google Meet allow you to put a face to the name, which helps clients connect. Platforms like Canva make it easy to create clean, branded proposal PDFs.

And don't forget the contract. Just as you wouldn't rent a car without one, never rent plants without a signed agreement outlining:

- Event dates and contacts
- Payment terms
- Indemnifications
- Client responsibilities if plants are damaged or lost

We use tools like Dropbox Sign to keep signatures organized and professional. Contracts not only protect both

parties, but also signal that you take your service seriously.

Tech + Process = Profit

Plant rentals succeed when you blend horticultural knowledge with operational systems. For us, that's meant building checklists for every stage—proposal, prep, delivery, staging, pickup and post-event inspection. We also inventory before and after each rental, track repeat-use plants, and rotate stock to keep things fresh.

Using technology to streamline quotes and proposals saves hours of back-and-forth. Clients appreciate fast, clear communication and visuals that help them picture the final setup.

Why It's Worth It

If done well, rentals can add 10% to 15% to your top-line revenue within a few years. They generate income during slow months, increase inventory ROI and create long-term relationships with corporate and event clients who often come back for design or installation services later.

Plant rentals aren't just about quick revenue—they're about future-proofing your business. The truth is, garden centers can't afford to operate like Blockbuster did—selling the same way forever while the world changes around them. We have to evolve.

So maybe your next best-seller isn't a $100 fiddle leaf fig—it's that same fiddle leaf fig rented out 10 times over. Rent. Return. Repeat. **GP**

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