

Features

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Meet Your Makers

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In November 2021, I wrote the article “Couch to 5K: Marketing in ¼ Time” for *Green Profit*, encouraging garden centers to add a couch or seating area to their floorplan. And many of you did it! Then, at conferences across North America, many of you talked about how awesome it was and how much it helped your business. (I offer this as proof of concept, so perhaps you’ll give a second look to the next iteration of “making couch happen.”)

Examples of pansy-pounding projects at Koetsier’s Greenhouse in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In that article, I included this subhead: “The Experience IS the Marketing.” Here’s what followed: “The other thing your competitors do is invite people to ‘come hang,’ using those exact words on social media posts.”

“Come share our space”—the “and shop while you’re at it,” remains unspoken. Businesses that invite customers to “come hang” have followings. Experience is the marketing because people who have a good experience tell their friends. Heck! They bring their friends.

In May 2026, John Stanley, Sid Raisch & Dries Jansen wrote along similar lines for their Adapt or Die series: “Create an Experience, Don’t Sell Product.”

All of this to say: Experiences, in all shapes and forms are not going away. In fact, the thirst for them is only growing. And if you added a couch, this is the next step in getting people to come hang.

Get ready to meet your makers.

Garden Centers as Makerspaces

[Makerspace.com](https://makerspace.com) defines a makerspace as, “a collaborative work space inside a school, library or separate public/private facility for making, learning, exploring and sharing that uses high tech to no tech tools.” Bingo!

These spaces invite tinkering, experimenting, collaboration and, most importantly, RETURN VISITS.

There's another type of "makingspace" that's multiplying like a mushroom on a log and that's "Art Cafes." Happy Medium in the NYC area has been profiled multiple times in various publications. If you go to their website, happy-medium.co, you can draw the view from your window on their website and submit it! At the cafes, guests can order from a menu of activities like watercolor painting, paint-a-pot, collage buffet and more. The kit is brought to their table and they can create! They also offer a schedule of classes for larger projects, such as building chairs or figure drawing.

Another fun place is Crafts and Drafts in Durham, North Carolina (craftsanddrafts.com). It's a DIY bar and bottle shop, where people can also order craft kits and enjoy making. One of their kits is a terrarium kit! (You could be providing those places with the kits!) Once you start noticing these types of places, you'll find them everywhere.

And you can BE one, too.

To be clear: I'm not saying you should offer figure drawing at the garden center (although that could be fun! If clothed!).

To some extent, your garden center is ALREADY makerspaces if the space has a plant potting bar, a terrarium bar or any other quasi self-serve creation station, or if you offer classes and workshops. That means you're already reaping some of the benefits of being makerspace-esque. So what's the next step?

Low-Cost, High-Profit Creative Workshops and Experiences

Here's the thing about creating things with cool plants: it makes people want more cool plants.

When you lead a porch pot class, everyone goes home with a porch pot that they can enjoy for the season. They'll walk past it on their way in the front door and that's that.

When you teach people how to make cyanotypes with plants or hammer pansies onto dishcloths or make pressed flower bookmarks or watercolor collages or teach them how to sketch their gardens, you're helping them develop a relationship with their plants that goes beyond passive looking. You train them to want more from their gardens and therefore want more IN their gardens.

Koetsier's Greenhouse in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has the low-cost, high-profit creative workshops dialed in. Their Bloom Studio is part of the greenhouse where they do Wine and Design parties (for porch pots) and planting activities. But a couple of years ago, they started what they call, "The Table," which is actually several sturdy picnic tables that can be pushed together in a row along one side of the greenhouse. That's where they host watercolor workshops and hammer flowers, decoupage pumpkins and make wreaths.

Melinda Koetsier, the ringleader and teacher of the workshops, talked with me about what they've been up to. (You can also catch her at my Imagination Activation panel at Cultivate, 9:00 a.m. Saturday, July 11.)

"At the last watercolor collage class we had, half the people didn't even follow the project. They were perfectly happy sitting there doing their own thing. Two said 'I used to do this all the time, but I haven't in a while,'" Melinda said. "I really think people are looking for an excuse to relax!"

Pansy pounding was fun, too. "One lady was just violently hammering! You can do it with all kinds of flowers. You just soak the cotton fabric beforehand with alum mordant, rinse it, dry it, then hammer the flowers!" You can purchase the alum online.

In addition to regular classes, Koetsier's also hosts lots of corporate events and team-building workshops. "I have several companies that bring different groups every year. Next week I have 98 people coming from a credit union," she said. "They cater in lunch and half the group will eat while half plants and then they swap."

If you run workshops, but haven't tapped into the corporate world, that's a great way to grow your audience. Melinda said it's especially great to do planting workshops for corporate near the end of the season when you're trying to get rid of plants.

"At the last Wine and Design workshop half the people hadn't been here before." Melinda said that most people come back to multiple workshops, "and they always ask when the next one is."

Her plant-art focused workshops are priced at \$25 to \$40, which makes them much more cost-effective for repeat customers. "And the supplies are cheap," she added. "Maybe \$5 for most of them and with watercolors; you can teach dozens of workshops with the same supplies."

Plant-Focused Project Ideas

Intrigued, but don't know where to start? If you're at Cultivate, I have a three-session arc to help you starting at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, included with your all-access education pass. We'll be hearing from others doing these workshops, you'll get some hands-on creative learning and get all the brass tacks about how to coordinate, sell, teach and wrangle the workshops.

In the meantime, I have two great sources of ideas for you. First is the brand-new book "Art from the Garden: Create 25 Beautiful Botanical Projects" by Kerry Michaels with Liz Micheels. You'll find cyanotype projects, lampshade, pressed flowers, gilded weeds and more. I want to do every single one of them and so will your customers. (The flower ice cubes might be difficult onsite, but if you have a party ...)

The other source is a company called Treleaf. I ended up on their wholesale email list and was intrigued when I received a newsletter about holding painting parties with their "bare" line of stylish houseplant trellises. I spoke to their founder Zeba Parker about how she created her products and why they're great for garden centers who want to dip their toe into more artsy/crafty classes.

"I have too many plants," she said. "And I use them as decor, of course. But I couldn't find trellises with much style." So, after moving from Minneapolis to Atlanta several years ago, she joined—you guessed it—a makerspace in Atlanta and started learning to use the laser cutting machines. She made her first trellises for herself, but then her friends wanted some. After seeing people use acrylic paint pens to customize their stakes, she started making the unfinished line. (The part that goes under the soil IS finished so it doesn't rot.)

"Garden centers and plant shops will host a houseplant class talking about repotting and plant supports, and then let the attendees decorate our mini plant stake, which wholesales for \$5. Most attendees end up buying a plant for the stake, too," she said.

I could keep going and going about this topic, giving you ideas and extolling the health benefits of creating, but we're out of space. Come see me at Cultivate and other conferences this summer and stay tuned for Part 3 of our make-maxxing series this September! **GP**

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