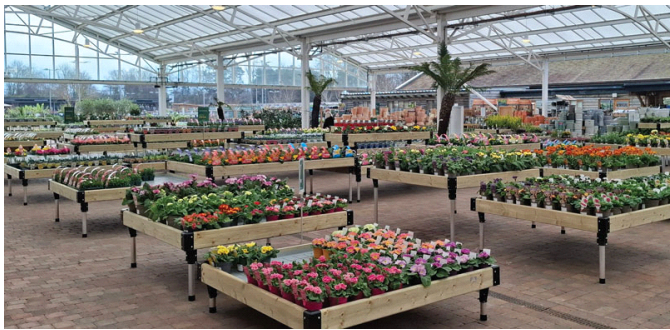


Cover Story

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Putting Your Best Foot Forward

Jennifer Polanz



There are multiple levels of investment into garden retail spaces to elevate and refresh them, from a coat of paint on the lower end to new structures on the higher end. The one right in the middle is investing in new benching. This can provide a new look, but it also has additional benefits, as you'll read about here. One of the first keys, though, is to know when to take the leap.

"My recommendation is very simple: If your store has not been refreshed in terms of layout, display concept or furniture for more than 10 years, then it is probably time to do it," said Marco Orlandelli, CEO of Orlandelli Group. They're headquartered in Italy and also operate directly in the U.S. through Orlandelli LLC based in Ohio. "Consumers notice when a store evolves. They appreciate retailers who invest, improve and create a better experience.

Nostrand offers the Signature Hybrid display system of aluminum subframe and treated wood surround with adjustable legs, as well as the low-maintenance Prestige Aluminum line.



"At the same time, they also notice when a store has remained the same for too long. In retail, standing still is risky."

Sometimes taking a step back and looking at the overall layout and design can prompt new questions and create new solutions. "From our experience, investing in new benching is about far more than refreshing the look of a garden center. The visual impact is immediate, but the bigger benefits are often operational," said Lionel Humphris, sales manager at Nostrand Ltd., based in Ireland with a U.S. office in Schaumburg, Illinois.

He added many garden centers are still using benching systems that were installed decades ago, and since then, customer expectations, labor costs, water usage and merchandising needs have all changed.

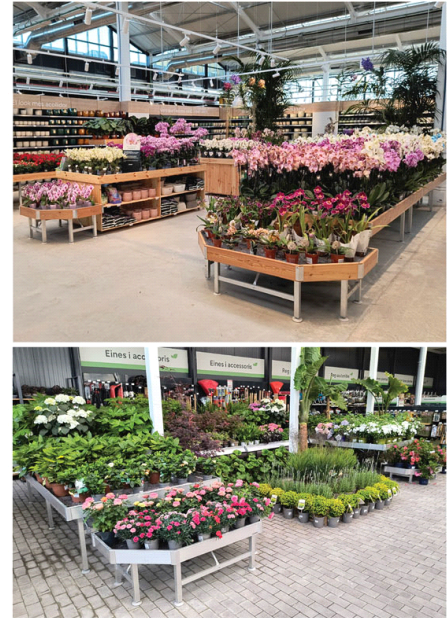
"New benching gives retailers the chance to rethink how the entire plant department works," he said.

Creating a Better Display

Jayson Olson, vice president of sales at Poly-Tex Greenhouse & Display Systems, based in Castle Rock, Minnesota, recommended starting with the customer journey to get a feel for what kind of displays would work for you.

Two benching options from Orlandelli Group as shown at a Fronda garden centre in Spain: the wood line called AMOR and the aluminum line of display systems.

“Create a strong first impression with seasonal feature displays, then use clearly defined merchandising zones that naturally guide customers through all product areas,” he said. “Varying display heights add visual interest and makes the space feel more dynamic without sacrificing capacity.”



Marco also talked about height. “If everything is displayed at the same level, the area quickly becomes flat,” he said. “By mixing benches, raised displays, podiums and vertical elements, retailers can create rhythm and guide the customer’s eye through the space.”

Flexibility is key, as well. Everyone I talked with offered mobile solutions with benches and display tables on casters to be able to move the sales floor around quickly and easily.

“Even small layout changes can create an improved shopping experience and encourage customers to explore more of the garden center,” Jayson noted, adding benefits like improved loss prevention by storing displays after hours, easier restocking and changing promotions or moving inventory. “Portable garden center displays are invaluable when retailers need to quickly transition seasonal departments or quickly move products under cover to protect from severe weather.”

Marco also noted that sometimes that quick change can be just the fresh look a customer needs to understand something has changed.

“This flexibility is especially useful near the entrance and in high-traffic areas, where the customer should immediately perceive something new,” he said. “In many successful garden centers, the first impression changes frequently. That does not always require a major redesign. Sometimes it simply requires the ability to move displays, reorganize colors, create a new focal point or highlight a new seasonal theme.”



Creating Opportunities

Many of the newer display systems have the ability to include additional merchandising accessories that can help spur add-on sales for items like fertilizers, soils, containers, watering tools and other products. In fact, at Poly-Tex they encourage retailers to think about options they offer to integrate sign holders, hanging basket purlins, messaging header panels and other sales tools.

The BH3000-C Basket Hanger with casters from Poly-Tex is a versatile, year-round display with an option for a wreath display conversion kit, while the PX7040 benching with optional hanging basket purlin is great for spaces against a bare wall or fence.



Nostrand offers tables that can elevate products that are often relegated to the ground or get messy, like trees on their tree supports table, and climbing and vining plants on the climber support table.

Both Nostrand and Orlandelli offer benching systems that can be equipped with watering systems for healthier plants and reduced labor through less watering time.

"Messy watering, puddles on the floor and wet foliage can create both practical and visual problems," Marco said. "Sub-irrigation systems, such as ebb-and-flow trays, can keep plants healthier and the shopping environment cleaner."

Nostrand offers flood trays made of quality high-impact polystyrene with a UV-stabilized surface that resists color fade, buckling and distortion.

Making the Right Impression

In talking about what Orlandelli was highlighting for spring of 2027, Marco said they're looking closely at consumer habits.

"Customers want inspiration, not just products. They want to understand how plants can improve their homes, gardens, patios and lifestyles," he said. "This is especially true in indoor plants, home decor and premium gift areas."

This has led them to develop indoor plant and decor solutions with brushed wood and black metal frames, designed to create a warmer, more elegant, boutique-style feeling while still being practical.

At Poly-Tex, their focus is helping retailers like you merchandise more efficiently, providing fixture products that are designed for long-term, lasting value. Hearing their customers' needs and suggestions, they're bringing new products to market like Plastic Top Step Benches and Plastic Topped End Caps, Stand-alone Hanging Basket Displays (with multiple purlins to maximize hanging planter capacity), Galvanized Steel Bench Tops and Plastic Topped Tables that are lightweight and strong.

"We're seeing increasing demand for display systems that are versatile enough to support multiple product categories throughout the year, allowing retailers to get more value from every fixture they purchase," Jayson said.

At Nostrand, they're continuing to get the message about their offerings out to the U.S. market, which include multiple types of fully aluminum and aluminum-treated wood hybrid systems with lots of variations and add-ons, along with the aforementioned flood tray watering system.

Lionel summed up the return for new benching nicely, in that the biggest improvements they see when retailers change over are a cleaner, more professional first impression, healthier plants through more consistent watering, reduced labor from integrated irrigation and greater flexibility for seasonal displays, along with better traffic flow.

"What's interesting is that a benching upgrade often creates a wider shift in the business," he added. "Staff take more pride in the department, merchandising improves and customers tend to spend more time browsing."

“In short, new benching doesn’t just make a garden center look better. When done properly, it helps the department operate more efficiently, present plants more effectively and deliver long-term return on investment.” **GP**