

Kiss My Aster

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Again with the Fairy Gardening

Amanda Thomsen

I got caught, yet again, disparaging fairy gardens the other day. Yeah, AGAIN. I mentioned them (not in a good way) during a presentation I was giving to garden center people and afterwards everyone came up to me to either thank me or scrap with me about it. Then I accepted a ride to the airport from some of the attendees and we talked about fairy gardens for, like, the whole 90 minutes. I didn't know it was possible for so many people to have this much to say about something so miniature.

It breaks down to this:

Let me be super clear: Fairy gardens are great and have tons of possibilities—when done well. Truly, I love whimsy more than the next gal. If you're fashioning fairy buildings out of bark and copper wire and buying handmade fairies from local artists, I believe in you. If you're recreating the trash compactor scene from Star Wars on a miniature level, including water lettuce and duckweed, I believe in what you're doing. Are you customizing doll house furniture to be one-of-a-kind and useable by those between the ages of 3 and 90? That's cool, I support that. If you're hoarding acorns to make a fairy feast that's farm-to-table, I'll support that all the way. No need to read further, here's a high-five. Or, I guess, a really tiny, super low-five.

However, most of the stuff I see in garden centers is just cheap junk: Many garden centers have all their chips on poorly executed junky fairy gardening stuff and that scares me ALL THE WAY TO MY BONES. If you're getting in cases of molded resin from China, what's differentiating you from the fairy stuff at the dollar store? Or how about this: there is only so much variety out there. Are you carrying the same fairy garden stock as the next nearest garden center?

It's often not even marketed to or fun for children. They're for static garden displays in an adult's garden and you know they chip/break super easily. It's a good thing they come in a case of 24 because five of them are gonna break straight off the bat. Wouldn't it be fun if it was, uh, fun for kids? I'm all for miniature gardening for kids. What a rad way to get kids involved with gardening.

Sometimes fairy garden stuff isn't merchandised with fairy gardening-sized plants (and some retailers don't even offer fairy gardening-sized plants). Isn't the whole point to sell plants? To get people interested in a different kind of gardening? Is dried sheet moss a plant? I don't even have an answer to that last one. Neither does Google.

Garden centers should be taking a deep look at their business structure, long-range plans, newfangled doodads and what's coming next and instead many are just like, "We have fairy gardens and that's enough to keep us current." It just isn't. What are you going to do next? What's the plan? Miniature gardens aren't a Band-Aid; do the work.

We're killing a perfectly adequate trend with cheap junk. I could say that fairy gardening has infinite possibilities with an extended expiration date, but we're killing it with the flood of easily broken, easily replicated, totally not-unique tschotske. I'm the Queen of Tschotske and I can't even with this stuff.

Hey, so you're great at selling tiny stuff! How about working on bigger stuff? Like perennial/shrub combos, water features, trees they should know or entire backyards?

That being said, I really like all the Studio M Mary Engelbreit/Gypsy Garden. ㄟ(ˊˋ)ㄟ

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