

## Kiss My Aster

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### Farmed Snobbery

Amanda Thomsen



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In garden centers, it's good to be knowledgeable (and, of course, we need to be), but at what point does that knowledge become unapproachable to customers? When does knowing what side of the plant goes into the ground encroach on snobbery? Especially to customers that may already be feeling vulnerable because they feel out of their league?

More often than not, snobbery is a perceived thing and not really based in reality, but when an adult enters an arena (like gardening or garden centers), where they do not already feel comfortable, vulnerability and other awkward feelings can inflate. How can we clamp down on that?

**Smile.** I'm at an age where I might punch anyone that tells me to smile, but if employees already know that this is a sales tool, you can hopefully avoid having to ever remind anyone to smile. Basically, the best tool in the toolbox

is free, but we don't want to ever be reminded of it. I'm so guilty of this.

**Ask lots of questions.** You don't even have to talk, because when you do, your dazzling knowledge may overwhelm. This isn't a spelling bee, it's a conversation. Just listen and answer back with more questions. Be interested. Or, if you're a little jaded like me, just ACT interested. DO NOT act interested in the same way we fake it when a kid talks to us about the most recent "Paw Patrol." That comes off as condescending. This is a skill and it takes time.

**Body language.** I can shut down a customer 300 ft. away. Sadly. This only works with decent people and that leaves me wide open for the insanely high-maintenance ones that aren't receptive to any cues of any sort. The kind who want lots of personal attention because they're lonely and they'll walk out buying one spike and that's it. This is a cautionary tale. Keep your body language open and friendly by not looking down, keeping yourself from going rigid and see #1.

**Laugh a lot.**

**Keep the Latin to yourself** until you've listened enough to know it's okay to whip that scorching hot knowledge out. It really just bristles people. I think it's sexy though.

**Mirroring.** Do you get bored listening to customers? I do. So I mirror them to keep me busy and make them feel at home. If they have one plant in their hand, I'll reach for a plant. If they play with their hair, I'll fuss with mine.

**When you can, use their name** (as long as it isn't in Latin. See #5). If you're using their name, you're including them. I cannot do names so sometimes I'll call someone "Mrs. Sunny Patio," "Windowbox Lady" or "Tomato Guy" and that usually is pretty endearing, if I do say so myself.

As we all know, you're at your most approachable when holding a running hose. It turns out that scientists have proven that garden snobs never water and that there's no way you can make someone feel vulnerable while holding a long tube of rushing water, even though they could easily get soaked on the approach.

Have you ever given thought to your vibe? Is it snobby? It turns out it's not so hard to turn that around, but you might seem a little snobby sharing these tips. You should definitely just copy this a few times and leave it on the breakroom table. No need to make anyone feel extra vulnerable. **GP**

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*Amanda Thomsen is a regular columnist in Green Profit magazine. You can find her funky, punky blog planted at [KissMyAster.com](http://KissMyAster.com) and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.*