

Features

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Ready, Set ... Grow!

John Johnston

The fresh produce bandwagon is a crowded place these days. Throngs of consumers are keen on fresh veggies and all-natural herbs. Organic edibles gardening is consistently among the fastest-growing segments in the garden center, even winning over “do-it-for-me” buyers!

Projecting the growth of seed-starting and capitalizing on its sales potential is something our industry has been slow to do. However, a makeover in this department can yield more than just seed packet sales. You have the power to create a mindset that keeps them coming back for more in the years to come. With the addition of a small selection of hydroponic options, it may be the beginning of new selling opportunities.

The Race Begins

Which competing retailers in your area offer the most complete seed-starting departments? Do they advertise in print or use social media? Are they stocked with a large assortment of seed packets, multiple ways to get started and the newest products to get consumers in the door? Might this be a prime opportunity for your store to stand out from the pack?

Start with what's hot: hydroponic kits, improved LED lighting, non-GMO seeds, coir pellets and new OMRI-listed fertilizers and soils. This is the low-hanging fruit to help you differentiate from the big box chains.

Believe it or not, the word “new” still turns heads at retail. Assemble a collection of new products in a high-traffic area and highlight the display with callout signs. Promoting new products is also a way to secure sales and higher gross profits before the consumer sees a featured item somewhere else.

Improve Your Packet Potential

Traditionally, the first 15% to 25% of the right-side entrance into a store is utilized for “seasonal flex” displays, featuring timely products and merchandising that piques consumer interest enough to slow them down as they enter the store. It's the first-choice location to promote seed-starting, early spring bulbs and even Valentine's Day, St. Paddy's Day and Easter products as the calendar dictates.

While seed-starting products benefit from positioning near your store's entrance, that's not always the case for seed packets. Packet sales are often best when displays are located away from high-traffic entrances/exits and cold winter air. Instead, find a visible spot deeper inside your store, preferably one where the temperature tends to be warm. Doing so encourages consumers to linger and feel at ease while they read variety information and consider their purchasing decisions.



Pictured: Seed-starting display at Primex Garden Center in Glenside, Pennsylvania.

If your store has the capacity to align seed racks along wall perimeters, do it. This approach has been proven to yield higher retail sales versus walk-around or spinner racks. Consumers faced with a “hide-and-seek” hunt for seed packs can quickly become fatigued or frustrated.

In addition to making your packet assortment easy to survey, be sure it’s well organized. One best practice is to categorize seed packets by type to kick-start your

customer’s search: Annuals for Sun, Annuals for Shade, Perennials, Vegetables, Tomatoes, Herbs, All-America Selections Winners and New Varieties. Mount colorful, easy-to-read signs above these racks to help consumers connect quickly and from a distance.

Create an even better shopping experience with seamless transitional wood flooring or an area of indoor/outdoor carpeting to soften sounds and differentiate the selling space. Eliminate tripping hazards and remove high-level obstacles to improve sightlines, too.

Completing the Sale

The very best seed departments include a host of complementary products to make the project (and add-on sales) easy. Wall displays of seed packets are often slightly elevated so related merchandise may be stocked directly below. Products to consider here include seed-starting kits (in addition to featuring in your seasonal flex area!), seed trays, seed-starting soils, bulk and packaged pots in popular sizes, gloves, humidity domes, misting bottles, PH test kits, lime, plant labels and planting amendments including water-soluble fertilizers. If these items can’t be positioned together, make sure to allocate these products in displays with close proximity to your seed-packet display.

Leading change in selling new LED lighting technology requires extra space and effort. Provide a demonstrator display complete with LED light fixture, assorted containers, using a grow table or greenhouse. A sampling of plants in various stages of growth allows the customer to make a visual connection. Selling pricier performance products sometimes takes a “seeing-is-believing” nudge to open up wallets. Your store’s message of success should include callouts of improved culture benefits along with expected results.

Don’t miss out on opportunities to be the best merchant for seed starting. Your first impressions, excitement and colorful visual impact can provide an experience for returning customers all year long, and year after year. **GP**

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