

## Kiss My Aster

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# 10 Ways to Draw Kids into IGCs (and Keep Them Busy)

Amanda Thomsen



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Whether you like kids or not, it's a fact that they A) exist and B) they come into your garden center. I say you embrace it and make them WANT to come into your place. After all, they're the next generation of shoppers (and possible employees, too).

At the very least, keeping the kids busy while their parents can shop (and can still keep an eye on them) is a priceless service that will surely earn you glowing reviews from the under-12 crowd and the people who drive them around/actually buy stuff. Here are 10 super simple ways to do this:

1. **Painted Stone Hunt:** Kids love finding Easter Eggs, so why not hide a bunch of painted rocks everywhere and supply some old baskets or whatever for collecting them in? Always tell the kids that there are five more rocks hidden than there really are. This will keep them engaged longer while also teaching them that life is hard.
2. **Sticks and Logs:** Pile up sticks, logs, a few old tarps and watch a village be made before your very eyes.
3. **Sandboxes:** A sandbox is a weird thing because kids who are WAYYY too old to be interested in it are suddenly transported back to being a little kid again. It's the sensory play that you hear people talking about. I hide plastic dinosaur bones in mine and supply paintbrushes so they can excavate like paleontologists, but you do you.
4. **A Tiny Campsite:** Throw up a tent and a fire ring (no fire) with some other random camping gear and let little ones go bananas with their imaginations.
5. **Garden Center Cat/Dog/Fish/Goats:** This is feasible/already being done in many garden centers; in some, it just doesn't make sense. Make sure you have some treats for little hands to offer said animals. Hope no one loses a finger.
6. **Potting Bench:** A tiny table can be set up with some leftover plastic pots and trays, soil, hand tools and seeds, and let them pot things up. When they ask where the stuff is that they potted up last time, point to your spendiest Japanese Maple and watch that kid insist they bring it home with them. You can supply smocks or not.
7. **Worms:** A worm bin is a great way to compost your lunchroom food scraps AND teach kids about vermiculture!

You can also ALWAYS use more fertilizer, right? Lift off the lid and ask kids to identify what kind of food bits they see inside. They will be all “EWWW!” at first and then watch it like it’s Kids YouTube after a while.

8. **Paint-A-Pot Drop-In:** Maybe just for busy weekends, but have some terracotta pots for sale and set up a table with paints. Parents can bring home a souvenir of their day, kids will be proud of their handiwork and also they’ll need to purchase something to put in that pot!

9. **A Gnome Hunt:** Set gnomes up all over the garden center and have kids locate them. If they can recite where each one is once they get to the register, they get a sticker or prize (Oriental Trading has some sticky, slimy slug toys that are a HOOT!). This is different than the stone challenge because the gnomes stay in place. Less work for you.

10. **Old-Fashioned Straw Bale Fun:** Throw some pennies into a pile of straw. Have you ever done that? It takes FOREVER to find them. Then kids that are unimpressed by pennies are suddenly full of respect once they had to look for 320 minutes to find one. Then you just compost the straw once it looks ratty and start again.

Happy kids make not-crying kids and not-crying kids have parents who aren’t teetering on the edge. When not teetering, they’re freer to spend money, book services and be charmed by your sales staff. I think it sounds like a great, mostly pain-free opportunity! **GP**

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