

Features

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Sip This

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What Wallitsch Does

Jeff Wallitsch, retail manager at Wallitsch Garden Center in Louisville, Kentucky, has these tips for garden centers wanting to take advantage of the latest beverage trends.

- Jeff says people end up with all this stuff in the garden and they wonder what to do with it all. The answer is to create programming to help gardeners find ways to use those tomatoes, basil and all those herbs—and to make it easy.
- Host events—“show-and-tells”—at the garden center. Treat it more as a lifestyle/entertaining event. Have sampling and also products to sell. Use what’s abundant in the garden to create simple syrups, changing out herbs throughout the season.
- Stock cutting boards, shakers, shot glasses, etc. Offer what your customers would want for beverage creation without getting too heavily invested in inventory.
- Final tip: Have fun and be creative! Google basic recipes and put your own spin on it!

What the Pro Knows

Cook, storyteller and author Jonathan Bardzik knows his way around a beverage—and also a demonstration table. Here are his suggestions for garden-friendly beverage techniques to demo at your next event.

Muddling: Combining herbs with sugar in a glass and then crushing with a tool helps release aromatic and flavorful oils into any liquid that is then added. Think mint, sugar and rum for a traditional mojito, or simply muddling together lemon verbena and sugar and topping with sparkling water. Muddling makes for great entertainment, too!

Simple syrups/infusions: Steeping herbs in sugar water releases their essences, and these can then be added to still or sparkling water or alcohol of your choice. Showcase different syrups from season to season. It’s a simple but effective part of a beverage demo.

Shrubs: Not the woody kind! A “shrub” is an old technique for preserving fruits by adding sugar, water and vinegar to create a syrup that can then be added to sparkling water or alcohol to create a refreshingly sweet-tart drink. Be sure to provide samples—your customers won’t believe how tasty this is!



From Combo to Cocktail

Darwin Perennials premiered its Herb-a-Licious Herb Combo program earlier this year. One of its six mixes is called Back Patio Sips and contains Scarlet Pineapple sage, Kasar basil, Sweet Leaf stevia, Mojito mint and Lemon thyme. Use for teas, mock/cocktails and refreshing flavored waters.

Sarah Greenwood, perennial plants trial coordinator for Star Roses and Plants, suggested keeping lots of recipe cards on hand. She works with Darwin Perennials' Herb-a-Licious Herb Combo program quite a bit and finds that it lends itself well to quite a few beverage recipes, such as the Ginger Basil Smash and Pineapple Sage Gin & Tonic. These and other recipes that pair well with the Herb-a-Licious program were inspired by herb cocktail recipes found at www.sheknows.com. "[The Herb-a-Licious Herb Combos] were one way that we were able to take advantage of Darwin's extensive herb product offering and package these delectable edibles into an ornamentally appealing product that puts some of these novel varieties within a consumer's reach," Sarah says.

Pictured: Darwin Perennials' Back Patio Sips mix from the Herb-a-Licious Combo Program.

Growing a Glassful

Give beverages of all sorts a punch of pizzazz with botanical additions (strawberry smoothies and blueberry beer, anyone?). Here are a handful you can mix, mull and muddle or use to garnish glasses:

Fruit Trees, Shrubs & Plants

Blueberry

Raspberry & blackberry

Apple, pear & peach

Citrus

Strawberry

Ginger

Rhubarb

Herbs

Cilantro

All the mints

Basil

Rosemary

Thyme

Veggies (Yes, veggies!)

Beet
Celery
Swiss chard
Onion, chive & garlic
Pepper
Horseradish

Edible Flowers

Pansy
Lavender
Chamomile
Begonia
Nasturtium
Petunia
Marigold



Selling On the Side

Layci Gragnani, edibles and rose brand manager for Star Roses and Plants, has a ton of ideas when it comes to IGCs selling and cross-selling to the latest beverage trends. Here are some of her suggestions.

- Cross-merchandise fruit and herb plants with other drink components, copper mugs, mixers, cocktail napkins and much more. “You’ve beautified their yard as well as appealed to their taste buds in one swoop.”
- Bushel & Berry worked with YES! Cocktails to co-

brand its Blueberry Basil 1 oz. mixer. “It was a huge success and a great giveaway item!”

- Product demos are a great visual to catch people’s attention, especially during customer events. Give out samples, coupons and recipe cards during the product demo. It’s a great way to bring in a younger audience.
- Small fruit/berry plants are great for kid-friendly recipes. Bushel and Berry plants are thornless, so kids can pick their own fruit and make a healthy smoothie with Mom.

Pictured: Star Roses and Plants’ Territory Manager Matthew Boyd makes margaritas and talks about their products during an event at Reston Farm Market in Virginia.

Re-SIP-es

Strawberries, lemons, mint and ... beets? Yes, veggies are just as welcome in mock/cocktails as all the other fruits and herbs. Here are two cocktail concoctions from Seeds By Design that use both conventional and unconventional ingredients. Visit www.seedsbydesign.com for more recipe inspiration.

Strawberry-Lemonade Mojito

Serving size: 1 drink

Ingredients:

2 strawberries, sliced

2 lemon slices
6 large peppermint leaves, roughly chopped
2 oz. light rum*
1 tbsp. simple syrup

Instructions:

Muddle the strawberries, lemon slices, peppermint, light rum and simple syrup together. Add ice and club soda and stir.

Green Monster Martini

Serving size: 2 drinks

Ingredients:

2/3 cup Albino Beet juice

7 oz. vodka*

¼ tsp. rosemary simple syrup

Beet Juice: Boil 4 peeled Albino Beets and tops with 2 cups water. Take it off the heat, cool and strain.

Simple Syrup: Bring to a boil 1 cup sugar, 1 cup water and 4 sprigs rosemary. Take it off the heat, cool and strain.

Instructions:

Combine beet juice, vodka and simple syrup in a mixer. Add mix, shake and pour.

*Lemon or lime juice can be used in place of alcohol in any cocktail recipe.



What's Kombucha?

Many people are choosing to limit or eliminate alcohol from their beverages nowadays. Kombucha, a fermented tea-based beverage, is one no- to low-alcohol option that has the same mouthfeel as full-bodied beers and other alcoholic drinks. And even better, it's easily made at home using homegrown fruits.

The kombucha brewing technique also is a great in-store workshop and demonstration idea. Because it's a fermenting process that takes several weeks from beginning to end, and also uses garden products, a demonstration on the

brewing technique could draw crowds and eager customers. **GP**

Pictured: Lemon-blueberry kombucha made by yours truly.