

Features

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Table Manners

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Each year, garden centers and nurseries look forward to warming spring temperatures to welcome their customers back to their stores. The winter doldrums get consumers worked up into a frenzy when it comes to anticipating fresh plants and new varieties regardless of its placement indoors or outdoors. Preparing for plant arrivals, including the task of cleaning and re-arranging benching and tables adds to the excitement and urgency. There's also no better time to think about improving the overall buying experience in your store! Your bench table look can influence your customers to buy even more in 2021.

Retailing at New Heights

Independent growers utilize space to maximize their greenhouse environment, usually by planting as much as the table bench will allow on one continuous level. Some businesses carry this habit over into their retail sales area. This visual to the consumer is misleading, as it may obstruct colors and varietal habits if staged from one height.

Retail benching that covers multiple levels exposes an incredible influence on how a customer shops for plants. Merchandising your tables by staging masses of color, grouping varieties and aligning compatible plants opens a world of purchase options to the consumer. It drives foot traffic from a distance, especially when combined with signage. With today's increased speed of consumer shopping, the shopper needs to be focused on what's eye-appealing quickly. Multiple levels of contrasting colors side-by-side with a little lift, for example, does wonders for imagination purposes.

Safety First

Do you regularly inspect the condition of your table benches? Are benches supported enough to handle the weight of mature plants (and their containers) that are watered and at their heaviest in spring? Will your table resist a collapse if bumped by a patron or shopping cart? A consumer's first visual shouldn't be benching in dire need of repair. This includes extruding wire, rotted cross beams and wood splinters that happen over time. The tell-tale signs of torn clothing or scratches and cuts from employees should be a giveaway as to your need to repair or replace. Anyone who's recently upgraded to new benching standards were likely surprised on how quickly their return on this

important capital improvement (investment) was.

Table Choices

Over the past decade, more owners are opting to convert old hardware wire cloth-topped plant tables with resin tops that are extremely rigid, resist temperature swings and offer years of no maintenance. With no splinters to worry about, the main upgrade concern is to provide enough cross sections and table legs to handle fluctuating weight needs. One company, AV Systems, has polypropylene bench tops that provide a high-quality, UV-protected, polypropylene bench top. These grids have many advantages: installs easily, interlock together, easy to clean and disinfect, and they're lightweight. The fiberglass table legs and frame are top-notch quality and provide one of the best professional looks in the garden center for retailing plants.

A longtime best seller of greenhouse and nursery step benching is Structural Plastics Company or SPC Retail, as it's known in the industry. These displays are easy to assemble, made from tough high-density post-consumer recycled plastic and hold up to 50% more plant material than wooden fixtures. In a matter of minutes, you may convert your retail space into a retail sales area that commands attention. Some of these displays are also available with caster wheels. The key to this selling look is its versatility in adapting to multiple retail levels by changing out leg heights. The backdrop of its dark bench color also enhances plants that are blooming or showing only green leaves.

Metal benching continues to find space in retailers where both great looks and mobility are desired. The trend of mobility is important to small to medium garden centers that need to refresh displays quickly for specific seasons and in-house events. Poly-Tex Inc. has many upright displays, but one of their most popular designs is the three-tier display with hanging basket bar that has owners condensing display space while growing plant sales. By taking advantage of perimeter wall space, you can provide a vertical explosion of color from a distance. Some retailers might opt to use these as a perimeter barrier to block customer passage to unwanted (or unattractive) store zones.

Cost Savings

The greatest movement among retailers is replacing benching that requires the most manpower to maintain. Ebb-and-flow flood tables work best with plant material that grows fast and dries out quickly. Displays set up in windy conditions that influence moisture loss is another candidate for your store. Any plant table that requires an associate with a water wand standing by daily should be considered for this style of display table.



Innovative Growers Equipment features hot dip galvanized tables with UV-resistant, polystyrene trays that can reduce water and fertilizer consumption by up to 90%. By cutting operational costs, these tables pay for themselves in only a few years.

Point-of-Decision Selling

The final piece of the selling puzzle is to provide recommendations for the growth and care of the plants

purchased. Keep in mind there are a lot of newcomers to gardening and you want them to be successful. It's difficult to persuade the consumer to walk excessive distances, retreat backwards or maneuver through social-distanced traffic to venture back into store aisles to buy their recommended products.

Communicate your recommendations by placing strategic signs with your plant materials. If you're fortunate to feature display space for these products along a return path leading to the checkout registers, you can create additional sales of up to 10 times the volume from what's typically sold inside at the shelf.

Having a store with great display looks, timely product recommendations and providing a safe shopping experience goes a long way toward creating an atmosphere that consumers have come to demand and expect from every brick-and-mortar retailer. Good selling! **GP**

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