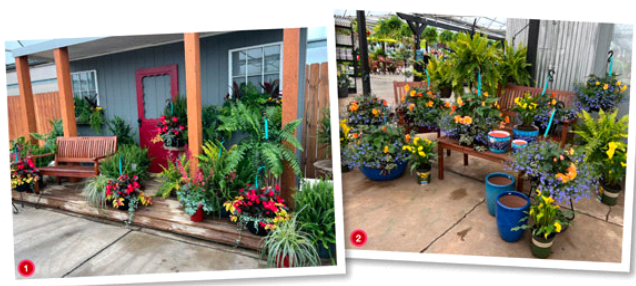


Features

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You Can, Too!

Jennifer Zurko



The minute you step out of your car in the parking lot at Koetsier's you're made to feel like you belong there.

The sign above the front entrance says, "From our home, to your garden." When you walk through the doors, there are large chalkboards that say: "Welcome! It's so pretty here!" and "Smiles grow here!" And I was immediately greeted by a staff member who wished me a good morning and said, "Welcome to Koetsier's!" To

which I replied, "Is that how you say it?" (It's pronounced like "kewt-seers.")

The Koetsiers have a long history in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with the first generation settling there from the Netherlands over 100 years ago. The land that the garden center is on was originally a "muck farm," where they grew vegetables for the farmers market. Those first Koetsiers started growing flowers and the property slowly transitioned to what is now an independent grower-retailer.

The third generation of Koetsiers—brothers Craig and Mike—currently run the business and grow about 90% of their hanging baskets and patio pots in greenhouses on-site. The annuals flats, and all of the perennials, shrubs and trees are brought in by local suppliers.

Koetsier's is known for their beautiful, bountiful baskets and patio pots, which Craig says are the most popular before Mother's Day, serving as quick spring décor and gifts. After that, the DIYers come in to buy flats and individual pots to fill in their own beds and containers.

The 28,000-plus sq. ft. of retail is split into sun plants on one side and shade on the other. As I strolled around the garden center, I thought there must have been canaries in cages somewhere, but it was actually the pleasant background music, with tweeting birds and trickling water, coming out of corner speakers. The sounds of spring made a nice touch for the shopping experience.

When you read this, the spring season will be pretty much over. But when I visited the first week of May, the weather was just starting to turn for the better in western Michigan and the forecast looked promising, so Craig was hopeful.

"Once the weather hits, it's going to be good," he said.

As I mentioned before, Koetsier's communicates with their customers in myriad ways, one of those being their excellent display signage. There's nothing better to serve as a planting pep talk quite like a sign that says: "We Grow

Pretty Things, You Can, Too!" GP

Pictured: 1-2 Vignettes in the garden center show customers the possibilities in their own front porches or backyards.

3-5 Koetsier's grows 90% of the hanging baskets and combos they sell, and there's a wide range in all colors and sizes.

6-7 An employee who's very creative and talented with the chalk helps give Koetsier's signage a step up.

8 A P.I.Y. (Plant It Yourself) succulent bar.

9-10 Koetsier's has an event and workshop space called "Bloom Studio" that they were preparing for a "Wine & Design" class where they partner with a local bartender. They've been doing them for over 10 years and Craig said they always have good participation.

11 Last year, Koetsier's started a text campaign using TapOnIt to send messages to their customers. Craig said that it's much more constant than a traditional direct mail piece and it lasts a shorter amount of time. People may hang onto a direct mail piece about a sale, whereas a text is read and then they move on. It's a much more timely, immediate way to reach their customers, said Craig, but it does take more dedicated time to engage with them more often.

12 On one side of the greenhouse is a red Volkswagen Beetle with plants inside and out. Craig said he just wanted something a little different to showcase the plants, and after visiting every junkyard in the area, saw this on top of a pile of cars. The engine was removed so that his team can fill it with plants. They fill it with pumpkins in the fall and greens during the holidays (they don't sell poinsettias).

13 Koetsier's feels you can grow pretty things, too.

