It was all laid out in front of me – idea after idea. The table was set on a patio in a beautiful garden-themed room. The table had a bright orange table runner, floral print placemats and centerpiece of spring flowers planted in a striking stone-like pot. The napkins were tucked into colorful songbird napkin holders and the patio was filled with an array of planted containers. Soft music filled the air. This may sound like someone’s backyard, but it’s not. It is a garden center displaying the recipe for my next dinner party.

That’s what garden centers do. We create scenes of solutions, give recipes for lifestyles that embrace nature and inspire those who are not as creative to try something new.

I strolled around to explore. Small stone birds were tucked under the foliage of a hosta. I could hear water from a small, bubbling fountain adorned with cobblestones and small plants. After a careful inspection, I noticed the plants were still in the containers and placed in peat moss and mulch. They could be purchased by customers or replaced as the season changes. I could smell flowers and moist earth. Color was everywhere. Cool, relaxing blues and yellow contrasted with the bright table, providing balance. Brighter colors mixed into the containers accented the display, and the layers of container sizes and plantings gave a feeling of depth and privacy.

All customers had to do was to imagine how this display could be duplicated in their own backyard. “I could do this,” I thought. I had never really considered orange for my patio table, but it looked great. I was not the only one planning my garden room. As the wheels turned in my mind, other dazzled shoppers pointed out details to one another. At this point, I was not thinking about the cost. I was visualizing what I needed to buy that would enhance my lifestyle.

These types of detailed displays will pay off. We sell plants, but more so, we sell ideas. The more elaborate, neat and eye-catching the display, the better it will work. The subtle details keep the customer searching for more. They spend more time in the store. The longer they stay, the more they buy. The merchandise for the display should be close, in good supply and well marked. Lifestyle merchandising requires creative ideas, so get everyone involved. Read lifestyle magazines, attend garden shows and take note of decorating ideas from the home decorating industry.

It takes planning and money to do it right. We have plants to add to the mix of lifestyles. Plants are our main focus, so use a plentiful mix of annuals, perennials and woody ornamentals. Plants will create the atmosphere and attract the senses. The table display without the plants would have been no more than a furniture display. It was the living atmosphere of plants and flowers that made the difference.

This type of merchandising allows garden centers to use inventory for eye-catching displays. Remember, if you choose this way of displaying merchandise, do it well and change it often. Satisfied customers will be back for more ideas.

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Inspirational Ideas