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# Marketing Plants for Outdoor Decorators

*Pre-assembled containers and drop n' go options are perfect for 'outdoor decorator' customers who are interested in partial DIY projects and new ideas.*

Among some consumers, 'gardening' can be a dirty word. In 2016, the 10% Project conducted focus groups with young gardeners (<50 years old) to assess ways to increase consumer interest in plants. They showed that many people felt that "gardening" is a time-consuming and pricey pastime. In an [article](#) from 2016 from Professor Emeritus Dr. Bridget Behe, "For most, gardening is seen as a chore, and many assume that those who like doing it have the luxury of time, space and income."



Photo 1. West Michigan garden center full of ready-to-go hanging baskets and container gardens to beautify decks, porches and patios.

However, during the 2020 pandemic, many people (old and young) turned to their gardens and landscapes as safe, enjoyable pastimes resulting in an increase of 16-18 million new gardeners. But smaller landscapes and areas for gardening have resulted in small patio gardens and mixed containers in soilless media is popular limited space versions of gardening. A notable consumer culture component is that instant gratification is important for many consumers that are used to Door Dash, mobile banking, and other convenient, fast services. The ornamental horticulture industry recognized this movement, and, in recent years, there has been a trend towards pre-assembled mixed containers and fully grown hanging baskets - not just flats of flowers (Photo 1).

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Photo 2. Three large gallon-sized mixed containers to be dropped into larger containers to provide instant color without the hassle of needing to do-your-own mix and match different plant species.

People can express their individual tastes by selecting from a variety of combinations without needing to design the containers themselves. Pre-assembled options are convenient options to have instant color in the garden, on the deck, or the patio.

During my spring garden center visits in West Michigan, I have also noted an increasing number of retailers carrying “drop ‘n go” containers (Photo 2). These provide the pre-designed flower combinations that customers purchase and replant in their own containers. The large gallon-sized drop n’ go containers are perfect for those that want to buy a pre-done container with a great plant mixture to “drop” into their larger containers at home. These are great for people who have outdoor areas with established containers designed specifically for that area (e.g., urns on a pool deck; back patio with large, heavy decorative containers).

Similarly, several retailers had mixed containers that provided a 6-pack of annuals together for an easy container garden as well (Photo 3).

Both container gardening packs are great for those who fancy themselves more as ‘home decorators’ than gardeners or may have uncertainty about which plants go together in terms of design or care requirements.



Photo 3. Mixed 6-packs of compatible plants with a carrying handle for ease of handling and fast planting into containers.

They also provide great value and are often offered at a lower price point than many pre-done mixed containers in the garden center.

A pre-mixed container of succulents is also a very attractive way to market these ever-popular water-saving plants. Many succulents are not very showy on their own, but when placed together their different colors and textures really pop and heighten their visual interest. I saw a few retailers carrying [‘Living Canvas’](#) planters that are great to plant into home planters (Photo 4 and 5).



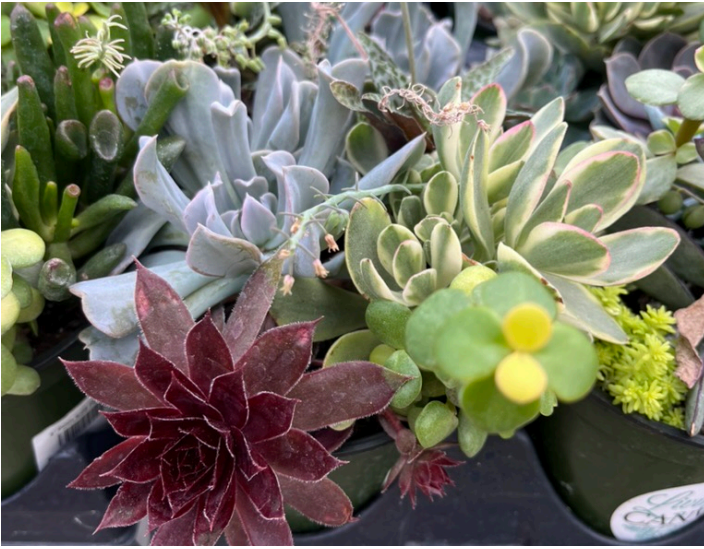


Photo 4 and 5. A 4-inch container (left) and a larger container (right) with a variety of succulents in production containers meaning customers can place them into a fancier container.

Often these containers are displayed with or near pottery and other interesting containers to plant them into. This is an example of cross merchandising where two complementary products are positioned by each other in the retail center to demonstrate use and heighten the probability of customers buying both products together.

Beyond ornamental containers, edible gardens are appealing to many consumers, especially those who are price-conscious, health-oriented, or looking for a sense of accomplishment. There are many opportunities to use edible gardens to attract customers. For instance, vegetable transplant combinations provide lots of value to customers. Anyone that has grown tomatoes or zucchini, knows that you don't need too many plants to have enough produce to feed a family. The high productivity is partially why these combo packs of tomatoes, crazy cauliflower, and culinary kale are so interesting for consumers (Photo 6).



Photo 6. Variety packs of culinary kale, crazy cauliflower, and cheery cherry tomatoes.



Retail garden centers provide a variety of products that customers value and seek to improve their homes, gardens and landscapes. Ornamental plant combinations have transitioned to improved ease of use through greater availability of pre-assembled containers and drop n' go options. These serve to demonstrate the plant's potential and design options for customers who are interested in partial DIY projects and new ideas. Plants are visual products and providing real-world examples where people can observe the design, texture and combined aesthetic is one means of attracting customers and upselling finished products. Edible plants and vegetable transplants are always popular and provide the opportunity to group complementary plants prior to purchase. This could aid in reducing customers purchasing packs of extra plants they do not need and serve in introducing them to new plants they may not have considered growing before. Many opportunities are available for garden center retailers and growers to showcase their products and engage their end consumers.





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