



Improving Images

For four years, Bench Systems' innovative fixtures have helped independent garden centers create dynamic displays and enchanting environments.

by Ann-Marie Conroy, Assistant Editor
amconroy@meistermedia.com

When garden center retailers began expressing the need for unique and attractive benches and fixtures, Doug Boyd listened. He, too, saw the market void for benching systems that would provide a warm and friendly atmosphere in garden centers. In response, he created Bench Systems.

Born four years ago out of the Maine Bucket Company, the business Boyd and his wife, Susan own, Bench Systems has helped nearly 500 garden centers beautify their displays and increase their profit margins.

"We started listening to our customers about what their needs were, and now we probably have thirty or forty different displays," says Doug. "It's gone very well with the independent garden centers."

The Image

Geared specifically toward independent garden centers, Bench Systems seeks to improve the garden center image by creating a softer environment, hiding some of the glass and steel with the hopes of appealing to female consumers, who Doug says make up 70 percent of garden center shoppers.

"I think the most important thing is to

understand that there's an investment in fixtures that needs to happen, and that investment will pay for itself in a short period of time if done correctly," he says.

Jim Crowell, owner of Atlantic Garden Center in Virginia Beach, Va. can attest to that. He has been buying Bench Systems fixtures for about three years and has received a positive response from shoppers.

"They love the displays," he says. "Our sales took a big spurt since we started using the benching."

Prior to discovering Bench Systems, Atlantic Garden Center displayed product on rectangular benches balanced on concrete blocks. They now use everything from hexagons to arbor systems, which are great for adding height variation.

"It gets you out of the mindset of doing things in a rectangular, linear mode, which is the way we used to think," says Crowell. "That's

not the way to do things anymore, and we certainly don't do it that way. We have lots of variety, lots of height and lots of free-flowing displays. If you order properly, that means you're going to get a variety of heights, and I think that's really key."

True To Promise

Bru-Mar Gardens, Nursery & Gifts in Annapolis, Md., saw perennial sales increase by 200 percent in 2005 after it began using Bench Systems fixtures. Bruce

Martin, co-owner of Bru-Mar, says he chose to use Bench Systems not only because of the quality products, but because of the friendly and professional staff, too.

"Doug and his staff are great to work with in all respects," says Martin. "Rarely is a purchase of this size as easy and true to promise as Bench Systems products have proven to be."

The Products

And, with a completely updated Web site, it's even easier for retailers to browse products and decide which items will work best in their garden centers. Customers can click on various categories, like arbors, tilt benches and rolling plant displays, for example, and view images and product descriptions. The Web site also offers customer testimonials and a "featured product" at the top of the page.

As for choosing which products to order, Crowell says he just likes to flow with the Bench Systems catalog and try whatever catches his eye.

"We've just been expanding our purchases and trying most everything with an open mind, and I think that has been helpful," he says. "It just gives you a fresh look."

TGC



For More Information:
Bench Systems
www.benchsystems.com
1-888-881-3081