

## Lesson 22: GARDEN CENTER BASICS

### I. LESSON DESCRIPTION

Students review a business guide for garden centers, then brainstorm ideas for a year-long merchandising and marketing plan. *Estimated time requirement for this lesson is 35 minutes.*

**Curriculum Standards:** National Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) Career Cluster Content Standards, National Council for Agricultural Education, 2009:

- AFNR LifeKnowledge® and Cluster Skills Standards (CS):
  - CS.01.01.01.a. Work productively with a group or independently.
  - CS.01.01.01.b. Demonstrate the ability to complete a task without assistance.
  - CS.01.01.01.c. Work independently and in group settings to accomplish a task.
  - CS.01.01.01.c. Work independentl
  - CS.03.01.01.a. Use basic technical and business writing skills.
- Plant Systems (PS):
  - PS.03.05.03.a. Identify storage methods for plants and plant products.
  - PS.03.05.03.b. Explain the proper conditions to maintain the quality of plants and plant products held in storage.
  - PS.03.05.04.a. Explain the reasons for preparing plants and plant products for distribution.
  - PS.03.05.04.b. Demonstrate techniques for grading, handling and packaging plants and plant products for distribution.

*Proper care of plants in the nursery and garden center will enhance the development of plants.*

**Student Preparation:** In advance of class, students should read the handout, 22\_GardenCenterBasics\_Reading.doc

**Student Learning Objectives:** After completing this class, students will be able to name seven areas of garden center management.

**Instructional Methods:** Reading Assignment, Class Activity.

## II. LESSON PLAN

Legend:

Text in normal face - Represents teacher's words.

*Text in italic face - Represents suggestions for the teacher.*

### Interest Approach:

- People's attitudes toward plant care can vary. Their feelings can range from attraction to aversion. Jerry Seinfeld said, "I have no plants in my house. They won't live for me. Some of them don't even wait to die, they commit suicide."
- At the other end of the spectrum, there's a Chinese proverb, "Life begins the day you start a garden." Grace Firth wrote, "Gardening takes a plot of land, a hoe and willing muscles. Scratching the soil, harvesting garden fruits, are peaceful pursuits. With a garden, there is hope."
- Plants cannot pick their owners, but people can pick plants. And helping people to pick the right plants is the job of garden center staff. They'll encounter both types of customers, not only the passionate collectors, but also the people who think that the top of the television is a suitable home for a juniper bonsai.
- The successful garden center is not simply a distribution point where plants find new homes. It is a carefully managed enterprise that requires horticultural skills, people skills, and business skills.

### Relevancy:

- This lesson will offer ways to develop skills in sales, customer service, marketing, merchandising, maintenance, safety and employee fundamentals.

### Learning Objectives:

- After attending this class, you will be able to describe these seven areas of garden center management.
- Now let's take a look at the operational aspects of working at a garden center.

## Instructional Methods

### Reading Assignment: 10 minutes estimated

- Distribute the handout, 22\_GardenCenterBasics\_Reading.doc, unless you assigned it as preparatory homework.*
- Please review the handout that you were assigned on Garden Center Basics. You'll have 10 minutes.

### Class Activity: 20 minutes estimated

- While students review the handout, write on the board the twelve months of the year. Leave plenty of space to enter activities for each month. Have your answer sheet available for quick reference, 22\_GardenCenterBasics\_TaskTEACHER.doc.*
- A garden center business is characterized by seasonal variety. Sales volume and products sold vary from month to month. If you were owner or manager of a retail garden center, how would you capitalize on the time of year to select and market your merchandise? Let's build a marketing plan for next year. Remember your goal is to maintain traffic in the garden center year round.
- Divide the class into 12 groups and assign a month to each group. Ask all groups to approach the board and to write on the board the answers to the four questions that you will pose.*
- First, consider the core reason that you opened a garden center to offer basic garden and landscape plants and supplies. What time of year will you be busiest with service to the gardeners? The busy periods seem to include 7 or 8 weekends in spring, and 7 or 8 weekends in the fall. What types of promotions can we offer during those months? *(Students record the ideas on the board under the appropriate month.)*
- Second, which holidays have particular associations with flowers or plants? What kind of stock should we order to meet the demand? *(Students record the ideas on the board under the appropriate month.)*
- Third, when should we schedule special events throughout the year? For example, should we schedule springtime presentations on newly-released plant varieties, or summer clearance sales, or bulb planting seminars in fall, or pruning demonstrations in winter? *(Students record the ideas on the board under the appropriate month.)*
- Fourth, let's identify slow times during the year. Are there any thin areas on the schedule where we could attract more traffic by offering an educational activity or a sale? *(Students record the ideas on the board under the appropriate month.)*
- Conduct a class discussion to review the plans of each group. Bring the students to consensus for the most effective approaches.*

**Summary:**

- Now you have a taste of just one of the business aspects of a garden center. The successful marketing expert can be just as creative as a garden designer.
- The next time you visit a garden center, you'll have an appreciation for the work and activities that come together to provide a pleasant and informative shopping experience.

**OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES**

- Invite the owner or manager of a local garden center to hold a discussion with students about best practices in managing a center, the outlook of small specialty stores competing with large chain stores, current garden trends in operation-gardening, and new plants.
- Assign students a journalism task to tour at least three garden centers and write an article evaluating the stores based on the criteria in this lesson. If you would like them to deepen the coverage of the article, ask students to interview the owner or manager about seasonal marketing techniques, special seminars, or other operational details that are not obvious to the typical shopper.
- A fairly ambitious activity would be to hold a plant sale. If enough plants could be obtained, students could experiment with various groupings of plants to create interesting displays. Students could assume specific roles in preparing for the event and holding the sale; you could designate a marketing manager and sales manager, and identify an experienced gardener to field customer questions in the information booth.
- Share with students the lists of free resources below and the websites below to encourage further study.

**RESOURCES****Books:**

- *So You Want to Start a Nursery*, Tony Avent, 2003, 340 pages, published by Timber Press, ISBN 0881925845 – highly recommended for startups. It is available from American Nurseryman Publishing Co., 223 West Jackson Boulevard, Suite 500, Chicago, IL 60606-6904, [www.amerinnursery.com](http://www.amerinnursery.com), 1-800-621-5727. This source also sells *The Complete Guide to Garden Center Management*, John Stanley, 2002; and *Establishing and Operating a Garden Center*, Edited by Susan S. Barton, 2002.

**Websites:**

- <http://www.anla.org/> - American Nursery and Landscape Association.
- <http://www.gardencentersofamerica.org/> - Garden Centers of America.
- <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/planting/treeselectionintro.htm> - Click on the link "Nursery Stock" to learn about issues like rootflare and selecting nursery stock.