

# Module 12: Garden Center Management

*Content adapted from:  
Dr. Jeffery Iles, Iowa State University  
Chapters 13 & 15 of the INLA ICNP  
Training Manual*



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Welcome to the Iowa Certified Nursery Professional Training program Module 12:  
Garden Center Management.

## Module Objectives

1. Be able to identify general types of customers in the garden center.
2. Understand your role in salesmanship and marketing in the garden center.
3. Identify how to use the garden center as the focus of marketing.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

This module has 3 objectives and upon completion you will be able to fulfill each of the objectives listed below.

1. Be able to identify general types of customers in the garden center.
2. Understand your role in marketing and salesmanship in the garden center.
3. Identify how to use the garden center as the focus of marketing.

For more information on Salesmanship and Personnel Relations refer to the module on New Employee Training and Professionalism.

# Who is Your Customer?



- 44.5% female
- 26.9% male & female
- 16.1% male
- 6.4% female & child
- 5.4% family
- 1.7% male & child

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

Research shows that in total 80% of your customers are female. However, they don't always shop by themselves. The report authored by Safley in 1992, shows that 44.5% of the time they shop alone, however they also shop with a male cohort (almost 30%), with a child (6.4%) or with the whole family (5.4%).

Males make up the other 20% of the total customer base and 16% of the time shop alone, or almost 2% of the time with a child, or in the other groups as described above.

Data from *Factors Influencing Purchases of Nursery Products in North Carolina*, Charles Safley, 1992.

## 3 Types of Customers

1. I know what I want. ← 15-20%
  2. I know what I need,  
but am not sure what to get.
  3. I know what I want to  
achieve, but don't know how  
to do it.
- 80-85%

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

In order to be an effective salesperson, you need to know what your customers want, think, need, and feel. Getting answers to some of these questions may be difficult, but an effective salesperson is able to work with a customer to discover answers to these important questions. Garden center customers can generally be grouped into 3 categories:

1. "I know what I want": This customer has given thought to what they want to purchase and are in the final stage of making the purchase. They head straight to the product they are planning to purchase, pick it up and go to the register. They don't need much help other than guiding them to the product location or to the register.
2. "I know what I need, but am not sure what to get": This customer usually knows what they need, but needs help finding the product or comparing similar products. Sharing your product knowledge is an important part of helping this customer make the appropriate selection and purchase a product that will meet their needs.
3. "I know what I want to achieve, but don't know how to do it": This customer will require the most attention and focus of a salesperson. You will need to use all of your personal skills as well as extensive product knowledge to help this customer achieve their goals.

Customers described in 1 usually account for 15-20% of the customers. Customers described in 2 and 3 usually account for 80% of your customers. As a result of this difference, you will need to communicate differently with the customers in group 1 than those in groups 2 and 3 if you want to be an effective salesperson.

# Why Your Garden Center?



- 66% - Good quality plants
- 11% - Good plant selection
- 7% - Knowledgeable sales staff
- 5% - Convenient location
- 4% - Low prices

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

Customers choose garden centers for a number of reasons including: good quality plants; good plant selection; knowledgeable sales staff; convenient location; and low prices.

Although these reasons are not equally important, they are all part of the decision process that will bring a customer to your store.

Data from *Factors Influencing Purchases of Nursery Products in North Carolina*, Charles Safley, 1992.

# Marketing

- Personal Selling
- Non-personal Selling



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

All marketing is divided into two major categories: personal selling and non-personal selling.

Personal selling is the interaction between a customer and staff person. How you interact with a customer will to some extent depend on what category they fall into, such as “I know what I want”, or “I know what I want to achieve, but don’t know how to do it” or somewhere in between. Refining your own personal selling skills to meet the varied needs of your customers is essential to success.

Non-personal selling includes advertising, promotions such as in store features, the store’s lay out and design, the types of products sold as well as in store signage. All of these are very important to the customer and will have a significant impact on their shopping experience and ultimately whether or not they decide to make a purchase.



# How to be an Effective Salesperson

- Personal qualities and product knowledge
- 3 important roles of a salesperson
  - Host
  - Consultant
  - Seller



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

Good salespeople possess characteristics that include kindness, friendliness, helpfulness and cheerfulness as well as product knowledge and sales skills. As the salesperson, you are a critical link in making sure all of the other things that have been done at the garden center to meet and serve the customers needs will result in a sale.

As an effective salesperson you can take on three different roles.

1. Act as a host by building relationships that will encourage customers to shop repeatedly at your garden center
2. Act as a consultant by being available to answer technical questions. Customers will come to rely on you for important and reliable gardening information
3. Act as a seller by increasing the average sale and encouraging the customer to return.

# The Garden Center as the Focus of Marketing

- Getting to the store:
  - Location
  - View from the Road
  - Vehicle Entrance and Parking
  - Customer Entrances
- Inside the store:
  - Layout
  - Fixtures
  - Carts
  - Displays
  - Signage
  - Check out

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

The garden center itself is a very powerful marketing tool. A number of things associated with the garden center directly impact the customer's shopping experience. It starts with basics things such as the store's location, how well the store is marked from the road, ease of entering the parking lot and finding a parking space and finding the entrance into the store.

Once a customer is inside, their shopping experience is influenced by another set of issues. The layout of the store and how the aisles are arranged within the store impacts buying, as do the fixtures and how easy it is for customers to see the products. You need to have carts that can be maneuvered through the aisles, but that can also carry large and bulky items. Different types of displays can be used to highlight promotional plants or give planting ideas, just to name a couple. Displays are essential to help customers see how they can use the different products. Good signage is also important in directing customers through the store as well as describing products. The customers final experience at the check out area is the last impression they have of their shopping experience, so the check out area needs to leave a positive image.



# Is Location Important?



Mulhall's Nursery (Omaha, NE)

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

5% of customers select a garden center simply on whether or not it has a convenient location.

# The View From the Road



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

The image of the garden center begins with the sign, and everything about this sign is first class. And, themes from the sign are carried throughout the store. The unmistakable “greenhouse cap” lets you know you’re dealing with green goods experts, and the lettering and primary color is uniquely Bachman’s.

# The View From the Road



Mulhall's (Omaha, NE)



Tangletown Nursery,  
Minneapolis, MN

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

That first impression is a very important one, and you want customers to remember your sign/logo.

The sign for the nursery on the left is large and easy to read. The sign for the nursery on the right is difficult to see from this view, however the large display of nursery plants along the street draws your attention.

# Vehicle Entrance and Parking



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

Almost everyone shopping at your garden center will arrive by motor vehicle. Entrances into the parking lot need to be well marked and easy to navigate through.

Your parking lot should be large enough to accommodate **all** of your customers on the **busiest** weekend. Angled parking is more efficient. Each space should be 9 feet wide (12 feet for handicapped spaces) and 20 feet long.

The area should be paved, relatively flat, have night lighting, and a place to corral those carts!

## Plant Displays in the Parking Area



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Avoid the “used car” look by placing displays between the road and parking lot. This is also a great to display products and show the plants growing in the landscape.

## Customer Entrances or the Front Door



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Customers go where we tell them to go. You can help direct them or let them stumble around “in the dark.” For starters, help them find the front entrance.



# Organizing Space Inside

- Inside the store:

- Layout
- Fixtures
- Carts
- Displays
- Signage
- Check out



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

Some general guidelines to follow for organizing the space within the store include:

1. 40% product space and 60% browsing space;
2. Allow more space for books, herbs, seeds, trees, and perennials;
3. Large aisle or “racetrack” around your garden center should be at least 9-feet wide to help customers move through the space.

The next several slides will discuss specifics related to the customer’s experience inside the store.



## Layout: Dead Zone



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

One of the most important zones is at the front of the store and is sometimes called the “dead zone”. Help your customers adjust to the shopping environment. Give them space to relax, and do not try to sell them anything until they are ready. This zone should be 10 feet or larger depending on the size of the store.

# Layout: Climate Zones



Transition Zone  
between inside and out

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Often there are a number different climatic zones in the garden center, and each zone has a different feel. Some times a transition zone is helpful in easing people from one area to another.

## Layout: Foot Traffic



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Research has shown that if you drive on the right-hand side of the road, you prefer to enter a store on the right and shop in a counterclockwise direction. Also, when a customer enters on the right they expect to see the cash point on the left. If you reverse this, the customer feels disoriented

Think about where you locate the entrance and how the aisles are arranged to move customers through the store.

# Layout: Grid



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

You want the customer to visit every part of the store and need to think about how you will help them move through the store to see all of these areas. A grid layout is one option. In this case customers enter one end of the store and travel up and down long, straight aisles until they reach the opposite end. Grocery stores and the big box stores employ this design.

## Layout: Informal or Boutique



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

In an informal or boutique layout, customers are encouraged to flow around islands or areas of product. Customers can wander throughout the store and enjoy the process of discovering merchandise. This can be frustrating if you are in a hurry and looking for a specific item.

# Layout: Sight Lines



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Positive, appealing site lines draw your customers through your store. You want them to notice something off in the distance that draws them to that part of the store.



## Layout: Destination Departments



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Entice customers to visit the corners of your store by strategically locating destination departments at the farthest points from the entrance and exit. The old, “milk at the far back corner of the grocery store” trick.



# Fixtures



## Fixtures should:

- Show off product
- Enhance your image
- Be cost effective
- Be light and easy to move
- Have adjustable shelving
- Have a standard style
- Be safe and robust

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

Fixtures are critical to selling your product. As a result fixtures should: show off your products; enhance your image; be cost effective; be light and easy to move to allow for more flexibility in how you design and arrange your displays; have adjustable shelving; have a standard style to give the store a unified look; and be safe and robust enough to hold heavy products.

You don't increase sales with expensive-looking fixtures, but you will improve sales if you optimize the position of the product in the store.

## Interior Fixtures



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

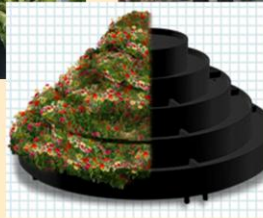
**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Along the wall, use fixtures to a height of 7-feet or to the ceiling to maximize wall space.

In the center of the store, keep fixtures below a height of 5-feet. This makes the store feel more open and allows you to keep an eye on customers.

# Exterior Fixtures



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

All kinds of materials have been used for exterior or plant fixtures, but you must pay attention to safety. In particular watch out for sharp edges and those that aren't stable.

Customers like to look down at plant materials, but don't necessarily want to bend down to pick them up. Thus benches and other fixtures become very important. Get "product" off the ground and at the "sight and take" position.

## Not the Best Example



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Although many of these plants are up and off the ground to make it easier for customers to view them, some of the trays are sitting precariously on containers. If a customer takes the wrong pot out of the tray the whole tray could tumble over damaging the plants and maybe injuring the customer.

# Using Props to Sell



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Using props such as hardscapes, garden structures, containers or garden ornaments is a great way to grab a customer's attention and get them looking at products. Sometimes all they need is a little inspiration to see how they can make that product fit into their garden.



# The Right Cart



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Carts need to be sturdy, strong, and stable, but also light and maneuverable. They need to have large capacity and puncture-proof tires.

# Displays

- Theatrical displays
- Power displays
- Living label displays



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Bottom line...you want your customers to come back...often. Every time they come back, your store should look different. Displays can help you do this. Change displays at least every eight weeks, but in spring, you might change them weekly, or perhaps daily.



# Theatrical Displays



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Theatrical displays are not necessarily product- or price-led, but provide the customer with ideas and inspiration. It's value-added!

# Power Displays



- Limit to **1** product
- Topical and in season
- Not for discounted products
- Build in a circle or pyramid
- Never let the display get half full
- Proper signage is a must

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

You want everyone to see power displays so locate them where they will gain the most attention.

Power displays differ from other types of displays in that they are: limited to **one** product; topical and in season; and not for discounted products.

It is also essential that these displays are always kept well stocked and that proper signage is used to direct the customer to their location.

# Living Label Displays



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

Living label displays help a customer visualize what the product will look like when it matures.

# Signage



Corporate Sign



Product Category Sign



Promotional Sign

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

Signage can play a number of different roles in the garden center such as: Corporate signs, product category signs, and promotional signs. Regardless of the role, it is essential that the signs be easy to read and provide customers with the information they are looking for.

Corporate signs are part of your brand. They must look good in daylight and in artificial light.

Product category signs are often directional signs which will help customers find a particular product they are looking for.

Promotional signs are often used to promote a particular theme.

One thing to remember is that all signs have a lifespan, so don't let them become unattractive.

# The Checkout



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE

IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION

This part of your store can generate stress among your customers. Research shows customers begin to get stressed when the line is longer than three-people deep. Further, 83% of women, and 91% of men say long lines will make them stop patronizing a store. You'll need the capability of operating multiple check-out lines during peak season.

Some view the checkout area as a separate profit center. Aim for a couple of impulse products that will increase the average sale per customer. Don't exceed \$10, and it's better if the items are below \$5. Products must be topical, staff must promote them, good signage is a must, and never let the display fall below being half full.



# A Positive Experience



**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

In the end, you want to make sure your customer has had a positive shopping experience and that you have made them want to come back to your store again, and again!

That concludes this module.

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HORTICULTURE**

**IOWA NURSERY &  
LANDSCAPE  
ASSOCIATION**

That concludes this module on garden center management.