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SMART IDEAS FOR INDEPENDENT RETAILERS | MAGAZINE

Cover Feature 10/5/2009 Sustaining Profits

### **Green initiatives are helping garden centers to be more eco-friendly and profitable at the same time**

For several years now, “going green” has been the hottest ticket in town. Companies large and small have been touting their eco-friendly initiatives. Some have been little more than costly public relations campaigns. Others have introduced genuine change while also benefitting the bottom line.

Our very own green industry has provided some stellar examples of companies that are going green and making green at the same time. This month we offer a look at three garden centers that embraced eco-friendly initiatives for everyone’s benefit.



### **Certifiably sustainable *Tagawa Gardens, Centennial, Colo.***

Tagawa Gardens is the first retail-grower and garden center in the United States to be certified sustainable by VeriFlora, a certification program for fresh cut flowers and potted plants. This rigorous standard means the company’s plants have been grown sustainably with respect for the environment, employees, community and business practices.

Achieving the certification was a major undertaking, said Tagawa Gardens’ manager Beth Zwinak. The company worked closely with the Visions Group ([visionsgroupllc.com](http://visionsgroupllc.com)), a consultant firm that helped Tagawa recognize and meet the many requirements for VeriFlora certification. For customers, the most visible evidence of this long journey is the VeriFlora logo that appears on every tag on plants grown on the premises.

The question is, do customers understand the significance of the certification?

“Some customers, those especially tuned into Certified Organic and OMRI [Organic Materials Review Institute] products, do get it easily and understand the significance,” Zwinak said. “But most don’t notice or have to ask about it. I think that our customers already expect us to be environmentally and socially responsible via our green industry and our reputation. The certification helps us quantify and make official what we hope our customers trust we are already doing.”

Tagawa Gardens' strategy is to continuously remind customers that they are—and have been—engaging in eco-friendly practices. A store branding effort named in honor of Tagawa's resident feline offers evidence of this. Products that the company believes have less impact on the environment are labeled "Grey Kitty Earth and Paw Friendly." The company is so passionate about this program, they had "Grey Kitty" registered as a trademark.

Grey Kitty recently made an appearance in a special sustainability initiative. This year, Tagawa Gardens offered "Purr-furred Geraniums" in a package that takes eco-friendliness to a new level. These sustainably grown geraniums were sold in biodegradable rice-hull pots. Tagawa even worked with John Henry Co. to produce a biodegradable tag. Bench signage provided background on VeriFlora certification and information about these special pots.



Zwinak said they hope to test more alternative pots in the future. In the meantime, they continue to support local container recycling efforts. Garden Centers of Colorado began a garden-plastics recycling program last year, which kept 120,000 pounds of plastic out of landfills. Zwinak serves on the association committee overseeing this effort. This year, Zwinak said, more than 15 independent garden centers served as drop-off locations and assisted with two large community events sponsored by the "Denver Recycles" program, Monrovia and The Denver Post.

*For more: Tagawa Gardens; [tagawagardens.com](http://tagawagardens.com)*

**THE BOTTOM LINE ON SUSTAINABILITY**

Corporate sustainability is a "key driver" of innovation that also yields real financial rewards rather than extra cost, a new study in the Harvard Business Review has found. "By treating sustainability as a goal today, early movers will develop competencies that rivals will be hard-pressed to match."

The report goes on to say that, in the future, only companies that make sustainability a goal will achieve competitive advantage.

"That means rethinking business models as well as products, technologies and processes," according to the study's authors.

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