

### Following the Three Rs

| Jennifer Polanz

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Check out gardening blogs, Pinterest, home décor websites and even hip, urban retailers. One trend that can be seen throughout all of the above is the recurring theme of reduce, reuse and recycle. The three Rs are being reintroduced as a sustainable way of life. So it stands to reason that garden retailers can fulfill their commitment to being “green” by repurposing and reusing materials in merchandising, as well as carrying products that have been repurposed or created from recycled materials. And though this trend is big with the younger generations, it really spans across all generations as more people strive to reduce their waste and be creative in repurposing materials for new uses. Here are just two examples of how to repurpose materials from businesses that cater to uniquely different aspects of garden retailing: Petitti Garden Centers, which has nine locations around the Cleveland area, and Nectar & Co., a company that rents plant materials for special events. Nectar & Co. also hosts an Annual Garden Market cash-and-carry tent event for three days in April, where concept shops are created based on the section’s theme, like Grillin’ & Chillin’ and 1-2-3 Container Gardening.

*Natural materials are big sellers nowadays, as visitors of the recent Gift Marts can attest. This wooden birdhouse is made to look even more woody with a wrap or two of dry vines.*

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**Martha Rancourt,**  
Home Décor Buyer, Petitti Garden Center

**GreenProfit:** What type of material have you found to be the best for repurposing and reusing for displays?

**Martha Rancourt:** Iron, reclaimed elm wood or any kind of reclaimed wood. We try to be very inventive and progressive in our displays. We travel across the U.S. to visit many other garden centers to see what they are doing, where we are, and where we might wish to be. Angelo Petitti and the Petitti family are very generous in supporting our efforts and travel plans every year. Last year we travelled internationally; our big trip was to India.



*Arbors don't need to stay on the ground. This one at Petitti's "floats" above the sales floor, allowing merchandise to be suspended from it.*

**GP:** What types of customers do displays like these attract?

**MR:** It's not a “type” of customer who is attracted to these displays. We try to provide a natural outdoor feeling and look that fits in with our products; a natural setting where you might find a gnome or a fairy. We create a garden center feel. The really great thing about all of our Petitti locations is they are not all the same type of buildings. They are not cookie-cutter, and different stores come up with different ideas. It is very exciting for me to travel to the different stores and see what they have come up with to interpret my buy.

**GP:** Can you provide some tips on using these types of materials in displays? How would a retailer get started in sourcing and incorporating them?

**MR:** For us, a logging company was stripping tree trunks and one of our employees thought it might provide the “look” and “feel” for a display we were building. The buyers are responsible for the store sets and for the products to be well displayed. We are lucky enough to travel with key people in our departments who also travel to Atlanta Gift Mart and who understand our point of view and what the “feel” of the displays should create.

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**Carmen Johnston,**  
Co-owner, Nectar & Co.

**Green Profit:** What type of material have you found to be the best for repurposing and reusing for displays?

**Carmen Johnston:** We'll use things like birdcages and put plants in them. We'll turn over strawberry jars and put a piece of 36-in. glass over the top to create a table. It's about looking at things and trying to find five different ways to use it. It's a challenge for me. We had an iron doormat which we had a machinist turn it into a succulent table. You really can truly use anything. We even used old paint cans and put flowers in them and hang them from the ceiling. We used old chicken feeders. You can truly use anything to create a display. We add linen to the tables—it's okay if that linen gets dirty. That's the great thing about sourcing from caterers.

*Carmen Johnston and her Nectar & Co. crew ask, "What five things can we do with this?" whenever they find second-hand props. And for this hand-me-down child's play kitchen, one of their answers was to cook up a garden full of herbs and flowers.*



**GP:** Do customers mention the displays, and if so, what do they say about them?

**CJ:** Last year was the first year doing (Garden Market). Customers came in and we had so many people say, "We've never seen anything like this before." I think this is just a new experience for them. They got so entranced in the displays and didn't pay attention to the price. They were asking how to use it in their garden. It shows off the product, and they're not as concerned about how much it costs. If the retailer takes time and effort to merchandise the product well, it shows the consumer, "I value this product so much and you should value it, too."

**CJ:** What are the benefits to using these materials?

**CJ:** The reason why we repurpose is because it's very cost effective. What we do is not expensive. We merchandise on what we call a Goodwill budget. Repurposing is a fun and creative way to merchandise. We don't have the funds to spend thousands of dollars to create these beautiful displays. We have Pinterest and Anthropologie to thank for this trend of repurposing items.

**GP:** Can you provide some tips on using these types of materials in display? How would a retailer get started in sourcing and incorporating them?

**CJ:** First, pay attention. Visit an Anthropologie at least four times a year; they do a phenomenal job of merchandising. We need to implement those ideas into our industry. The No. 1 industry you need to pay attention to is fashion, because that's what drives a woman's pocketbook.

For materials, we look for things in our greenhouses such as pallets. We know a lot of florists, caterers and others who do events, and they have to constantly change out materials to keep things fresh. We ask things like "What are you going to do with that arch?" and they sell it to you for pennies on the dollar. We try to buy their second-hand props. Goodwill and Salvation Army need to become your best friend. I know someone at Goodwill who will now call me and let me know when things come in. I think people need to go way outside the box to ask, "How can we use this in our display?" **GP**

### Catch Carmen!

Carmen Johnston will be speaking at the 2012 OFA Short Course in Columbus, Ohio.

Topics include:

- Pop-up and Satellite Locations, Saturday, July 14, 10:30-11:30 a.m.
- Merchandising on a Budget Workshop, Sunday, July 15, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

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