

Take the Spas create a complete outdoor living package plunge

By Sarah Martinez

The target market for spas mirrors that of garden centers. According to statistics from the Association of Pool & Spa Professionals, people purchasing spas are generally 35-54 years old with an average income of \$75,000.

At Plant Fair Nursery in Star Valley, Ariz., the average spa buyer is a bit older. Nursery president Glen McCombs said his store serves the area's large retiree community. His customers are intent on creating complete outdoor rooms and finding a place to "rest their weary bones."

Diving in

Reconnecting with an old colleague in the nursery business got McCombs started on the path of spa sales. A former co-worker who had entered the spa business encouraged McCombs to become an authorized dealer. After thinking about it for a few months, McCombs took the plunge and began offering Beachcomber Hot Tubs.

Plant Fair Nursery recently expanded its lineup by adding Hot Spring Spas to the mix. The store now has 14 in-stock models customers can choose from. McCombs said they'll also help customers place special orders with manufacturers. Most of the spas



Spas have become an important part of complete outdoor living packages.

are displayed in a covered pavilion area. Four models scattered throughout the nursery yard are used to create vignettes with plant material.

Plant Fair Nursery sells about 60 spas a year. That's not quite enough to keep a dedicated moving and installation crew on staff. McCombs hires a moving company to get the spas to their destinations. His son handles installation and also performs warranty work. If customers call for repair work after the warranty expires, they're referred to another local technician.

Getting started

McCombs has been offering spas for five years. The hot tubs have helped the nursery build a reputation as a true outdoor living center. He offered a few tips for retailers considering buying into this product category.

Hire an expert. "The most important thing is don't be as naive as I am," McCombs said. "Make sure you have someone on your staff capable of handling machines. If you don't have anybody or can't find someone, don't get into it until you've secured that person. I had to develop it from the back end."

Set aside space. Spa displays require a fairly large covered area. The products have to be protected from the sun. Otherwise the spa's acrylic interior will quickly begin to fade and crack. Canvas-type gazebos protect spas displayed in the nursery's plant yard.

Be prepared to educate customers. Operating a spa is easy. It's just a matter of pushing a few buttons. The challenge, McCombs said, is getting customers comfortable with balancing their water. His son often goes to clients' homes to help them learn to use spa chemicals.

For more: Plant Fair Nursery, (928) 474-6556; <http://plantfairnursery.com>.

Hot products

Take a closer look at these products that fit into the spa lifestyle.

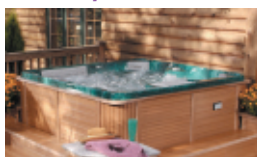
SpaScenes, Eagle Lake Graphics



SpaScenes are waterproof spa murals that add spice to drab spa covers. The kits are easy to install, interchangeable and will not harm the cover. Twelve scenes are available.

For more: Eagle Lake Graphics, (651) 470-2141, sales@spascenes.com; www.spascenes.com.

Concord Spa, ThermoSpas



ThermoSpas' Concord model can accommodate four to five people. The company is offering a new dealer program that lets retailers focus on sales while ThermoSpas handles delivery, service, warranty and complaint issues.

For more: ThermoSpas, (800) 876-0158, ext. 2832; www.thermospas.com.

