

By Don G. Campbell

Small growers can use their creativity to expand beyond sales in flats, 4" pots, 6" pots and hanging baskets. Packaging products with flair will increase sales. East Tennessee grower Greg Blakenship describes concepts he uses to generate increased demand for his one-man operation's products.

Last season, he sold 700 half-bushel Mother's Day baskets filled with a variety of annuals. "You have to do something with a classy look," he says.

Plants used include alyssum, begonia, ageratum, celosia, coleus, dahlia, marigold,

A Half Bushel Holds More Than Two Pecks

nicotiana, lobelia and salvia. All baskets were lined with plastic before the soil and plants were added.

"People are attracted to the variety and color. Packaged like this, they come across as higher quality," explains Blakenship.

"The public doesn't mind paying for them. While I wholesaled most to my customers, I also retailed some myself at \$18 and up.

Half-bushel baskets also work quite well for Supertunias (Pampas Fire). "This product takes a little more time to grow, but if you have the room outside, it is pretty easy. I sold 300 baskets of it in my first spring with people still wanting more."

He is following his spring success with 800 half-bushel baskets of fall mums that retail for \$20 and up.

Creative packaging sells itself. At a retail price of \$6 and up, an 8" zinnia pot is one of Greg's hottest seller. It can be grown in the south through the end of August,

making it perfect for his market.

His baskets of Black-eyed Susans retail for \$6 and he typically sells 2,000 each year. "The Black-eyed Susans are a good revenue source for mid-summer," he notes.

With the right packaging, the consumer's work is done already. Using baskets as Blankenship does, customer care of the plants is easy. Apartment dwellers would typically not buy many of these kinds of plants, but this packaging, they are suddenly big customers.

It all comes down to a value-added approach. Generate more revenue from good-quality plants by presenting them in ways that make them great decorations and gifts. Offer them in a way which requires little effort from the consumer. Try these ideas to spring off into some of your own. Do some test marketing to see what your customers like.

"You can be bold and daring, but be organized," Blankenship says. "Present your products cleanly and neatly. Show customers attractive ways to use your products, and they will want more of them."

