



Garden Centers of America: Together We're Better!

GCA's Key Connections: Member Profile
Jose Menendez, Retail Operations Manager
SummerWinds Nursery, California

Selling 'Guaranteed Success' Keeps SummerWinds Nursery Among The Top Garden Centers In The Country



“Our everyday mission is to guarantee success for our customers, and to become their trusted garden advisor,” says Jose Menendez, Retail Operations Manager of the three SummerWinds Nursery locations in California: Campbell, Cupertino and Palo Alto. The high-end garden and home retailer’s mission is to provide an exceptional customer experience through their knowledgeable, friendly associates, as well as their selection of high-quality plants, decor, outdoor living merchandise and gardening supplies.

SummerWinds Nursery, with its headquarters in Boise, ID, and several other retail locations stationed in the greater Phoenix, AZ-area, guarantees everything they sell. “Our slogan is, ‘We guarantee success,’” says Jose. It’s helped the retailer earn the No. 23 spot on *IGC Magazine’s* Top 100 report, clocking in \$24 million in sales.

And they stand by it – even if a customer brings back a dead plant, Jose says they will replace it, just so long as the customer purchased it at one of their locations, which they can verify through the Gardener’s Rewards Club. In addition to tracking customers’ purchases, the program accumulates reward points for every dollar spent. Once the customer reaches 250 points, they’re eligible for 5 percent off their purchase. Points don’t expire either, so shoppers can choose to save them to receive a larger discount.



For the most part, all three California locations sell the same selection of gifts, annuals, perennials, shrubs, trees, pottery, soils and patio furniture. But each store may have more emphasis on a certain item. For instance, the Palo Alto location has a stronger focus on and larger selection of organic and native gardening, cutting out a lot of chemical fertilizers and turning to more organic options.

The Campbell store has a spacious interior building that carries an array of indoor plants, where orchids and large specimens are the novelties. The staff here loves to get creative by incorporating a vintage VW Beetle into some interactive plant and decor displays.

Characterized by artistic vignettes and a high-end gift shop, the Cupertino location features a large selection of Japanese maples, pottery and garden art. This store was a featured destination on the 2014 GCA Summer Tour to the San Francisco, CA-area.



Creating an environment where customers feel welcome and inspired, SummerWinds Nursery makes sure to offer plenty of services for every type of gardener. The personal garden coach service sends a team of designers to a customer's home to provide landscape design help. There are several levels of service, ranging from a simple sketch to a detailed design.

For shoppers who need help transporting their plant purchases home, a delivery service gets the job done for a small fee. Container gardens are a growing category for SummerWinds, and they've devoted a space in each store for a Custom Creations potting area, where customers can buy a pot and watch it being planted on the spot.

While SummerWinds' large variety of color plants, services and organic solutions help set the garden retailer apart, Jose explains that it's the wonderful associates who help create the store's experience and atmosphere.

“We have knowledgeable, friendly, caring staff,” he says. “We want to make it easy for our team to take care of our customer and for the customer to feel like they can buy with confidence.”

Jose continues, “Plus, I think our guaranteed success culture sets us apart. The customer knows that if they buy something at SummerWinds and it doesn’t work, they can bring it back and get a refund. That’s a pretty cool policy.”

He explains that they want each and every customer to be successful, so he trains his staff to only sell customers on the items they really need – not extras that only help ring in a bigger sale.



“We believe in and count on our team,” Jose says. “They make the difference with our customers in creating that exceptional experience. We try to learn customers’ names, their pets’ names, their favorite plant or most recent purchase. When a customer comes in, we want to make them feel like they’re our friend – not our customer who’s only here to buy stuff.”

In order to draw in more “friends,” SummerWinds Nursery is changing their communication and advertising methods. “We’ve moved away from newsprint and focused more on digital advertising, blogging and social media,” Jose says. “The digital efforts are based on what users are searching for online around our locations.”

The aim of the blogs and social media sites has been to provide inspiration, solutions and the overall benefits of gardening. “They give you a venue to be visually inspiring,” he says. All of these efforts especially resonate with Millennial and Gen Z consumers.



As far as additional future projects, Jose plans to start updating the informative signage at the Campbell store, modeling it after the signs he saw at some of the featured destinations in Seattle, WA, during the 2018 GCA Summer Tour.

“One of the things that really stood out for me was the informative signage that they had in Seattle at a lot of the different locations that we went to, so we’re going to incorporate some of those ideas here to make it easier for customers to find whatever they’re looking for,” he says. “And some of the displays were just gorgeous.”

Another element he noticed while on the tour was the fact that they do so much right at SummerWinds – it was affirmation that they’re on the right retailing track.

For Jose, the networking on GCA Summer Tour Seattle was just as informative as the stops themselves. “We want to help and learn from each other. We’re all in the same boat. We’re in it together. We’re in an industry where we share ideas, and that’s great. That’s where we benefit the most – by networking.”

Jose has been involved in the garden center industry since spring 1989, when he got a job as a cashier for Woolworth Nurseries, what SummerWinds was originally known as. He admits that at the time he was hired, he probably only knew the name of two plants – but he had an appetite for knowledge.

“I kept wanting to learn more, and I really enjoyed the business and the people, so I stayed,” he says. “I just worked my way through and kept changing departments so I could learn more and more. Eventually, I got a job as a manager, and now I’m in charge of the three stores in California.”

When he first started, Jose was attending the reserve police academy with intentions to become a police officer. But he soon decided against it, as plants “won’t try to kill me.”

“The industry is great,” he says. “The people whom you meet – either at work, vendors or when you go on these GCA Summer Tours – are great. The GCA Summer Tours are just awesome.”

