

Vertical Visibility

Laurel Hill Gardens generates excitement for vertical gardening with high-profile installations

LAUREL HILL Gardens jumped at the opportunity to install vertical gardens at a designer showcase home it was commissioned to landscape last fall. An interior vertical garden and two outside provided prime exposure for the growing niche at this Philadelphia garden center. "About 40,000 people came to the house, located within less than a mile from our garden center," Designer Philip Dominic says.

The customers at Laurel Hill most interested in vertical gardening fall into two very different groups, Dominic says: "Generally, it's first-time homebuyers, around 35 years old, who want interesting plants in their garden. And then there are the people who are older, members of garden clubs who are drawn to it because of the horticultural aspect."

To help get the word out about vertical gardening, Dominic brings vertical garden samples to a local garden festival, and holds seminars at the garden center. He also travels to speak to garden clubs about the trend.

Offering customers a choice, Laurel Hill carries EvoOrganic's Aria Vertical Garden and Black Beauty systems, as well as a galvanized frame system from a local manufacturer. Aria holds 12 direct-planted plants and must be mounted to a wall. Black Beauty, a free-standing unit, is



Seizing the Moment

(From left) Owner Joseph Ascenzi and Designer Philip Dominic take every opportunity to show the public the beauty of vertical gardening, building their installation and sales business.

about 5 feet tall and holds 24 plants. "Black Beauty takes 6-inch pots, so you can't direct-plant it. But if a plant dies, you just take out one pot and put in another one," Dominic says. The galvanized frame system, about 20"x30", must be grown horizontally for about 10 weeks before it is mounted to a wall.

Laurel Hill showcases planted Black Beauty and galvanized frames at the garden center. Commercial installations around town, including at a popular Italian restaurant, also represent its vertical work. "On the exterior of the restaurant, I put a mix of flowers and other plants. Two frames going toward the kitchen of the restaurant are planted with herbs - rosemary, basil and parsley - so the chefs can go out and pick them from the wall," Dominic says.

Vertical garden installations bring in a pretty penny for Laurel Hill - up to \$80 per square foot, depending on what is planted. ■