

On-Line Only: Warschauer's Conversion Tips Greenhouse Grower June 2009

Jeff Warschauer, Vice President of Sales for Nexus Corporation, lists factors growers should consider before converting production space to retail.

1. **Availability.** Analyze the space you have to use for retail and when you can have access to that space, particularly if you are going from winter growing space to retail space in April.
2. **Parking.** How many cars you can park is an important factor in the retail design. There's no use investing in 30,000 square feet of retail upgrades and new benches when parking is far away and only 20 cars can be parked. Design ratios are very important.
3. **Retail Product.** What will you be retailing? The answer may help you decide which benches and displays you'll need and the best location.
4. **Benching.** Enclosed greenhouse space, canopy, and covered walk space may all use different bench layouts.
5. **Shade.** You'll need shade area if you plan on growing nursery and larger perennials that do well in cooler climates. Atriums and open roofs are good retail structures. Customers like the breeze when shopping instead of a hot, stuffy greenhouse with noisy fans or no vents. When the weather turns foul, you can close the roof.
6. **Equipment and Supplies.** Many growing facilities have equipment that should be stowed away when the facility becomes a retail garden center. Being mindful of children, this could include retention ponds, automatic doors, commercial moving equipment, water tanks and pits, watering booms and, of course, electrical, gas and water valves and switches.
7. **Safety.** It's always a concern! You may want to evaluate how many exits and entrances you will have and how many you really need, keeping in mind the codes that may apply for safety during an emergency.
8. **Walking Distances.** Will parking be convenient for shoppers to enter the store and also to return with a cart full of material? Your commercial carts being pulled by a tractor don't mind a bit of a distance, but the shoppers will. If this trip to and from is on gravel or dirt, do your carts have the correct tires?
9. **Re-Wholesale.** If part of your retail trade is for re-wholesale (landscapers) try to provide them with a different parking and pickup area and even a different check out area. They will greatly appreciate the setup.
10. **Irrigation.** Many companies can offer you bench tops, either with wire bottoms or self-contained or automatic water tops that can reduce your labor by not having to water every day.

Bonus: Finishing Touches. If you have old, messy benches you can cover them with a piece of nice green shade cloth or burlap for a cleaner dressy look.