

## Retailer Q&amp;A

Briggs Nursery:  
Why We Rebuilt

Despite sales increases year after year, the team at Briggs Nursery in North Attleboro, Mass., looked to the future and decided to rebuild the store. Gary Briggs explains why.



Gary Briggs

**Q.** Why did you decide to raze your old site and build an all-new retail operation?

**Briggs:** We felt we had maximized our potential for growth with our current facility. What our old facility had in charm it lacked in efficiencies. We all want “destination” garden centers. By improving our facility and adding new products, we could give them a reason to travel here.

**Q.** What were some financial risks you took?

**Briggs:** Obviously, taking on the large debt service to pay for the project and assuming future sales increases will pay for it. Also, with a new, larger facility we didn't know the right inventory and staffing levels so cash flow the first two years was difficult.

**Q.** We heard your family felt that your operation could not grow at the rate necessary if your store layout and square footage remained the same. How did you determine what the obstacles would be to your growth?

**Briggs:** Simple observation and listening. Our old facility was more than adequate for eight months out of the year, but as we all know it's those spring months that count the most. We couldn't physically put any more people through the store or add additional merchandise. Customers would comment and employees as well.

**Q.** How was the new design supposed to overcome the obstacles to growth that your old layout/design presented?

**Briggs:** By adding square footage you can increase your aisle width, shelf space, product mix and parking spaces and make it a more comfortable shopping experience. Our old facility had stairs and poor access to some areas. The traffic flow in the garden center is much improved.

**Q.** Can you please explain the thinking that went into taking on the financial risk and debt load involved in such a big change and interrupting your business to do it?

**Briggs:** Interrupting business wasn't as big a concern. We could operate on a limited scale in a temporary facility and only be closed during the slowest time of year.

Taking on debt and a new project is a risk, but it's part of being in business.

**Q.** What has been the outcome of the final project? What were the biggest challenges and what benefits have you experienced?

**Briggs:** We are very happy with the way our new garden center looks. We are now in a position to grow with our existing customers, add new ones from other markets and be relevant for the next generation of consumers. We have been able to maintain market share and be profitable by adding new product categories to make up for lagging sales in some of our core gardening categories.

The biggest challenge has been going through this in a very difficult economic environment.

**Q.** What advice can you offer to other retailers who might consider doing this to their garden center?

**Briggs:** Have thick skin, a tolerance for risk and plenty of cold beer available.

TGC



Briggs Nursery decided to do a full rebuild, which meant the old building had to go.



The new building will allow more foot traffic and, consequently, more sales.



The older building was not an ideal setting for a store that sells high-end products.



The new interior allows Briggs' merchandisers to create gorgeous and shoppable vignettes.