

In every retail garden centre, certain customer questions come up day after day. Knowing how to respond with clarity, confidence, and care not only builds trust, it can also lead to increased sales and return visits. Below is a detailed guide to the top 10 customer questions, including troubleshooting advice and recommended products to upsell with each.

The 10 Most Common Customer Questions at a Retail Garden Centre

1. "What plant can I put in this spot?"

Customers often describe a tricky area full shade, blazing sun, windy balcony, or compact courtyard. First, ask:

- > **How many hours of sun does the area get?**
- > **Is it exposed to wind, frost, or pets?**
- > **Are you after colour, fragrance, screening, or edibles?**

Common Situations & Solutions:

Full shade: Try *Clivia*, *Aspidistra*, *Peace Lily*, *Plectranthus*, or *Tree Ferns*.

Part shade: Recommend *Camellias*, *Hydrangeas*, *Hellebores*, or *Daphne*.

Full sun (low water): *Lavender*, *Westringia*, *Grevillea*, *Agapanthus*, *Rosemary*.

Windy areas: *Coastal Banksia*, *Pigface*, *Lomandra*, *Hardenbergia*.

Small spaces or pots: *Dwarf Lilly Pilly*, *Succulents*, *Hebe*, or *Lavender*.

Frost prone areas: *Deciduous trees* (e.g. *Crepe Myrtle*, *Japanese Maple*), *Cold-tolerant natives* (e.g. *Correa*, *Hardenbergia*, *Callistemon 'Great Balls of Fire'*), *Shrubs* (e.g. *Hebe*, *Viburnum tinus*, *Choisya*, *Photinia*) and *Perennials* (e.g. *Hellebores*, *Hemerocallis*, *Sedum*)

Products to Recommend:

- Quality potting mix (Debco, Searles, Martins, Grange, Richgro)
- Slow-release fertiliser
- Mulch or bark chips for moisture retention
- Seaweed solution to reduce transplant shock
- Decorative pots or hanging baskets

2. "Why is my plant dying?"

This is a common but complex question. Start by asking:

- > **How often do you water it?**
- > **Is it in a pot or the ground?**
- > **Has the light changed recently?**
- Any signs of pests or root issues?**

Common Problems & Solutions:

Overwatering: Yellow leaves, soft stems, musty smell. Let soil dry, remove mushy roots, repot with free-draining mix.

Underwatering: Drooping, crispy leaves. Water deeply and mulch.

Too much sun: Leaves look scorched. Move to part shade or use shade cloth.

Pests: Aphids, mealybugs, scale, or spider mites cause spotting, stickiness, or webs. Use neem oil or insecticidal soap.

Nutrient deficiency: Pale or slow growth. Apply a balanced fertiliser.

Pot-bound roots: Roots circling the base or popping out of drainage holes. Repot into a larger container.

Products to Recommend:

- Moisture meter
- Insecticides (organic or synthetic)
- High-quality potting mix
- Seaweed solution for plant recovery
- Self-watering pots or saucers

3. "When should I prune this plant?"

Most customers want to prune without damaging their plants. Ask:

- > **Is the plant grown for flowers, foliage, fruit, or shape?**
- > **What is the name of the plant, or can they show you a photo?**

Timing Tips:

After flowering: *Camellias*, *Azaleas*, *Gardenias*.

Late winter/early spring: *Roses*, *Hydrangeas*, *Summer-flowering shrubs*.

All year (light maintenance): *Hedges* like *Lilly Pilly* and *Murraya*.

Fruit trees: Winter for structure; summer to control growth.

General Pruning Advice:

- Use sharp tools and prune above a node.
- Remove dead, damaged, or diseased wood first.
- Don't prune in extreme heat or just before frost.

Products to Recommend:

- Bypass secateurs or loppers (for hard wood)
- Pruning sealant for large cuts
- Gloves and safety glasses
- Fertiliser for post-prune recovery (not for dormant plants)



4. “Do you have any low-maintenance plants?”

Perfect for customers new to gardening or with busy lifestyles.
Ask:

- > **Are you planting indoors or outdoors?**
- > **Pots or in-ground?**
- > **Will they remember to water or fertilise regularly?**

Low-Maintenance Picks:

Indoors (low light): ZZ Plant, Sansevieria, Peace Lily, Aspidistra.

Indoors (bright light): Monstera, Fiddle Leaf Fig, Rubber Plant.

Outdoors (drought-tolerant): Grevillea, Agave, Kangaroo Paw, Succulents.

Outdoors (hardy & colourful): Lavender, Westringia, Native grasses, Rhipidolepis, Dipladenia

Products to Recommend:

- Self-watering pots or soil wetter
- Slow-release fertiliser
- Indoor plant misters or humidity trays
- Water-saving mulch (sugar cane, straw, bark chips)

5. “How often should I water this?”

Help customers understand that watering needs vary by plant, location, and season.

General Tips:

Use the finger test: if the top 2–3cm is dry, it's time to water.

Potted plants dry out faster than garden beds.

Succulents and cacti: Fortnightly in warm months.

Tropicals and ferns: Keep evenly moist; don't let them fully dry out.

Seasonal Notes:

- > Increase watering during hot, dry, or windy weather.
- > Reduce watering during cooler months, especially for dormant plants.

Products to Recommend:

- Moisture meter
- Soil wetting agent
- Mulch for garden beds
- Drip trays for indoor plants

6. “What fertiliser should I use?”

The right fertiliser improves growth, flowering, and resistance to stress.

Match the fertiliser to the purpose:

Edibles: Dynamic Lifter, PowerFeed for Veggies and Herbs.

Flowers: Thrive Bloom Booster, Flourish Flowers & Foliage, Yates Rose Food.

Foliage/Indoor: Osmocote Indoor, Searles Flourish Indoor and Greening

Natives: Slow-release, low-phosphorus blends

Liquid vs. Granular:

- > Liquid fertilisers give fast results and are great during growth spurts.
- > Slow-release fertilisers offer long-term feeding and lower risk of overfeeding.

Products to Recommend:

- Matching fertiliser for plant type
- Organic compost or worm castings

7. “Is this plant safe for pets?”

Always ask:

- > **Are the pets cats or dogs?**
- > **Do they chew plants or dig?**
- > **Indoors or outdoors?**

Toxic Plants (Avoid):

Sago Palm, Dieffenbachia, Philodendron, Monstera, Lilies, Aloe Vera.

Pet-Friendly Alternatives:

Spider Plant, Calathea, Golden Cane Palm, Peperomia, Boston Fern, Camellia.

Products to Recommend:

- Pet-safe plant list or tags
- Raised planters or hanging baskets
- Bitter spray to deter chewing
- Barrier fencing or deterrent mulch

Click back to our
“Pet Safe Plants”
article in the
Autumn 2023
mag (page 12)
for more pet
plant tips!



8. “Can I grow this indoors?”

Help customers determine suitability by asking about their light, room, and care habits.

Great Indoors:

Monstera, Peace Lily, Fiddle Leaf Fig, ZZ Plant, Rubber Plant.

Care Tips:

- > Rotate pot every few weeks for even growth.
- > Keep away from heaters and air-conditioning vents.
- > Dust leaves monthly.

Products to Recommend:

- Indoor potting mix
- Decorative cache pots
- Leaf shine spray or microfibre cloths
- Grow lights for low-light homes



9. “How do I repot this plant properly?”

This is a highly common question, especially with indoor plant buyers or customers bringing home something from the “clearance” or “needs TLC” section. It also opens the door to cross-selling pots, soil, fertiliser, tools, and care products.

What to Ask the Customer:

- > Is the plant root-bound or just due for an upgrade?
- > Will it stay in a decorative pot or move into the garden?
- > Is it indoor or outdoor?
- > What size pot are they planning to use?

Repotting Tips:

- Choose a pot 1–2 sizes larger with good drainage.
- Gently loosen the root ball, especially if roots are tightly coiled.
- Use fresh, species-appropriate potting mix (e.g. cactus mix, orchid mix, premium indoor blend).
- Press soil in lightly, don’t compact.
- Water in well and keep the plant out of direct sun for a few days post-repotting.
- Avoid fertilising for 2 weeks post-repot to let the plant settle.



Common Mistakes to Warn About:

- Using garden soil in pots (too heavy, poor drainage)
- Planting too deeply (can cause rot)
- Choosing a pot that’s too big (leads to soggy roots)

Products to Recommend:

- Potting mix suited to plant type (e.g. Indoor, Rose & Citrus, Orchid Mix, Cactus & Succulent Mix)
- New pots with drainage holes and matching saucers
- Seaweed solution for transplant recovery
- Soil wetter or perlite (to improve drainage)
- Slow-release fertiliser (to start after 2–3 weeks)
- Gloves, scoop, and potting mat



10. “What can I plant right now?”

Use seasonal recommendations and a calendar to help them get planting today.

Autumn (NSW/ACT): Broad Beans, Kale, Garlic, Sweet Peas, Pansies

Winter: Bare-root roses, Stone fruit trees, Cabbage, Leeks

Spring: Tomatoes, Basil, Zinnias, Petunias, Corn

Summer: Sunflowers, Cucumbers, Chillies, Eggplants

Products to Recommend:

- Seedlings or punnets
- Planting guide calendar
- Seaweed solution for transplant shock
- Veggie fertiliser
- Mulch and compost

Equip Staff with Cheat Sheets & Product Pairings

Access this article as a word doc via the QR code below to amend it for your business based on the products you sell. You can then print your guide for:

- Staff counters and POS
- Induction for new team members
- Laminated quick-reference cards in high-traffic areas

Or convert the content into:

- A blog post for your website
- A social media series: “Top Garden Questions Answered!”
- Seasonal in-store posters with QR codes linking to your fertiliser or plant range

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