

# JOB TALK

## SEA OF COLORS

**Texture and color combine to brighten water park surroundings.**

by James E. Guyette

■ There's nothing fishy about the selection of plant materials at Sea World of Aurora, Ohio. The aquarium-oriented theme park avoids missing the boat by following through with *themes* when choosing the flowering fauna that adorns the grounds.

"Not a marigold or tree goes in unless it's part of a theme," says Rob McCartney, Sea World horticulturist. "We theme everything—and at Sea World we use aquatic colors."

Blues and greens are commonplace, and plants are carefully picked to carry forward a certain aspect or illusion that coincides with the area to be decorated. One striking example is a flowerbed outside a shark tank that bears a striking resemblance to an under-sea scene—yet it's done entirely with above-ground plantings.

"We've done a lot of things with color, and now we're doing things with texture," McCartney explains. In addition to items like the afore-mentioned aquarium area, efforts are made to reel in the patrons tactilely.

"We're focusing more and more on touch. People love to touch things," says McCartney. "We've positioned our baskets (of flowers) so people can touch them."

Patrons who want a flower in their hair or one for the baby's stroller won't be forced to walk the plank for borrowing one from the many color spots at Sea World.

"If you want to pick flowers—fine. But we don't have problems with people destroying our park like other (amusement) parks have," McCartney notes (the clientele has a healthy helping of grandparents and small children to help put a damper on hooliganism). "One reason is that we don't have many 15- to 17-year-olds is because we don't have rides."

**Bubbling with enthusiasm**—The texture technique is applied throughout the entire park as people are enticed to become a part of the actual decor. Roped-off regions and barricaded byways are kept to a minimum. Large rocks are placed so that they make an inviting spot to rest.

"We have people sitting on boulders when there's a bench right there—and then they become part of the landscape."

Catering to creature comforts is a Sea World strategy that can be applied by landscape managers at other public enterprises. "Find out what people want," McCartney advises. "Taking a survey is something you can do."



**At the entrance to the Shark Encounter exhibit, a bull shark done in topiary 'swims' between boulders over a bed of plume ferns.**

"If people want shade—give it to them." So many amusement parks seem to be intent on punishing people with acres and acres of concrete, boiling under a hot sun, yet most folks are quite content with "simple things like shade and a place to sit on the grass."

Sea World is user-friendly in that a man taking his family on an outing to look at fancy fish—when in reality he'd rather be sitting down to dinner to eat one—can find enjoyment by taking in the natural beauty supplied by McCartney and his staff. Hanging planters are recommended for areas that might not lend themselves to conventional flower beds.

"A little touch of color in an area where you don't expect it is good," says McCartney, who spoke at the Northeast Ohio Green Industry Educational and Winter Trade Show. Proper planning can add a lot to such seemingly mundane installations. "Around a lemonade stand, use lemon-colored marigolds."

Plants are adjusted to match climate conditions and ensure a suitable display. "People spend more than \$20 to come to Sea World in May and to come to Sea World in August, but the people in May also deserve to see (an acceptable floral show); we can't tell them it's too early in the year," says McCartney.

A species that is prone to disease or pest problems is given the deep-six. "We don't bother with fungicides and all that. If it looks bad, we rip it out," McCartney explains.

The park's floral foundation is enhanced by getting all the other employees involved when the big spring sowing session is planned. "We plant all of them in 15 days' time," McCartney reports. "We get accountants and everyone's mother" to help with the landscaping.

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