

AHS PARTNERS IN PROFILE

OXO: High-Quality Tools and Community-Building

by Courtney Capstack

IT MAY HAVE a growing reputation around the world, but OXO International goes to great lengths to ensure its employees—625 worldwide—retain the feeling of a close-knit family. And it is that same familial atmosphere that has helped to contribute to the high quality of its rapidly growing product line.

TOOLS FOR A VARIETY OF HANDS

Now launching at least 50 new products on the market annually, OXO has come a long way from the 15 kitchen tools it first introduced to the American market nearly two decades ago. Its products—more than 500 in all—range from kitchen items to bath accessories, hardware, and—more recently—an ever-expanding line of garden tools.

“We have noticed that people often combine a passion for cooking with gardening,” says OXO Product Manager **Michael Delevante**, “and we felt it would be great to make a product statement across the entire field.”

OXO originated in 1990 when **Sam Faber**, the founder of a popular housewares company, noticed that his wife was having difficulty gripping her kitchen tools because of slight arthritis in her hands. To solve this common dilemma, each OXO product is developed with the Universal Design concept—designing ergonomic, easy to use tools for the

broadest spectrum of consumer needs.

OXO’s gardening tools also stand alone with their “Signature Grips,” a feature on each tool “that allows the gardener to maintain a firm grip on the tool, even when the hands or the tool is wet,” says Delevante.



A group of OXO employees gathers to test and evaluate a variety of gardening tools as part of the company’s hands-on approach to new product development.

Some of the most recent OXO gardening products include the Mini Pour & Store Watering Can and the Container Garden Set. “Right now our main focus is product development,” says Home and Garden Category Director **Julie Mak**, “especially products focusing on urban gardening trends.”

GOING THE DISTANCE

To affirm their products are the highest quality possible, OXO staff members often travel great distances to test tools in the field. “One day we went to various rooftop gardens throughout New York City to gain an urban gardening perspective,” says Delevante. “Another great

experience is when we went to a team member’s farm house in the country to test new products.”

COMMUNITY-BUILDING FOR EDUCATION

When it came to forming a partnership, both OXO and the AHS saw the match as a move that fits. “One of the primary reasons we were interested in partnering with OXO is because its employees believe in being good citizens,” says AHS Director of Development **Barry Goodinson**. “They think it’s important to give back to the community.”

A corporate partnership with the AHS is one of the ways that OXO manifests its commitment to giving back. As the AHS Education Sponsor, OXO co-sponsors educational programs such as the AHS Garden Schools, the National Children & Youth Garden Symposium, and the Green Garage® display at the 2007 Northwest Flower & Garden Show. In addition, OXO is providing gardening tools for use by staff members, interns, and volunteers at the AHS’s River Farm headquarters.

It is due in part to their familial environment and dedication to creating quality products that OXO has grown into the successful company that it is today. “OXO prides itself on its family atmosphere, and we also got that feeling with AHS,” says Delevante. “This partnership is less like a traditional partnership and more of a friendly collaboration to spread similar goals, for example, green gardening tactics. We are just beginning to scratch the surface of what we can do together.”

Courtney Capstack is an editorial intern for The American Gardener.

For more information about OXO International, visit www.oxo.com.

Interested in forming a corporate partnership with the AHS? Please contact Barry Goodinson, director of development, at bgoodinson@ahs.org or visit www.ahs.org.