

LAWN & GARDEN
Retailer's

Merchandiser
Of the Year
FINALIST



Using unique materials can add differentiation and extra creativity to your merchandised displays. See what our first finalist has done to give its displays that little extra push.

COMPILED BY CATHERINE EVANS

A VERY VEGGIE CHRISTMAS

What do zucchinis and Christmas trees have in common? The only logical answer to that question is Smith's Acres, a unique garden center and farm stand in Niantic, Conn. At Smith's, every season provides a new opportunity for the staff to merchandise traditional products in a non-traditional way.

The Veggie Girls, the affectionate name given to employees, strive to incorporate plant material, garden gifts and even fresh produce into their imaginative displays, and this year was no exception. The plant material in the greenhouse inspired most of the display ideas for Christmas 2006.

Welcome to the first annual *Lawn & Garden Retailer* Merchandiser of the Year Award. We are introducing you to the first of three finalists (in no particular order): Smith's Acres in Niantic, Conn.

The unique thing about this garden center is it incorporates not only gardening materials in displays but produce as well. It has displays with holiday décor and apples or even a Christmas tree with banana tree accents around it.

We wanted to make sure you get the full feeling of what it is like at Smith's Acres when it comes to creativity, so we have printed the garden center's award submission essay as well as some pictures of the displays that made it a finalist. Take a look and see what you think because you will be the one voting on the final winner at the end of the year and we want to make sure you are as informed as possible. Enjoy Smith's Acres.

— Catherine Evans

Red and white. In one location [in the store] red poinsettias and euphorbia 'Diamond Frost' plants were blended with colorful pots, red empire apples, traditional needlepoint stockings and, of course, a red bench for Santa to rest if he got tired. "Classic Christmas frosted with a twist — sounds like a holiday cocktail," was how one customer described the display.





Victorian white. For the more refined customer, a hunter green and Victorian white display was created in the far corner of the conservatory. A 12-ft. alpine white tree was decorated with vines of ivy and adorned with several hundred hand-spun glass icicle ornaments. By the end of the season, only 13 icicles were left. Antique-reproduction shoes were stuffed with fresh Christmas greens and hung along the edges of the display on old house shutters. A large Victorian-style birdhouse was the final touch, although it was sold two weeks before Christmas and shipped to Louisiana.



Blue and white. A set of glazed blue pots and ice-encrusted gazing globes were punctuated with white poinsettias and giant Boston ferns along an adjacent bench. Smaller pots without holes in the bottom were turned into mini water gardens in which the staff floated plastic snowflake ornaments, and the ice crystals that gathered on the outside of the glass greenhouse panes provided the perfect backdrop.



Tropical. Further down the greenhouse aisle, the tropical plant section, complete with orange and banana trees, got a holiday spin as well. Brightly colored tropical fish ornaments were hung from a display tree, while small, pink flamingoes danced along the branches of a kumquat tree. In all, more than 500 different ornaments were sold out of this display, despite the fact that it was not what you would call traditional New England.

Under the sea. Hanging outside the greenhouse door, “Under the Sea” wreaths invited customers inside and reminded them that it was always summer at Smith’s Acres.



Although there were several other plant/produce-inspired displays at Smith’s Acres this past Christmas, these were some of our favorites. Most of the displays were created the first week of November, and by merchandising plants and garden gifts together, most of our customers were likely to pick up at least three different items from any given vignette.

Always known for thinking outside the box, Smith’s Acres not only celebrated Christmas, they reinvented it this year.

— Smith’s Acres LLC

For more information about the Lawn & Garden Retailer Merchandiser of the Year Award, contact Catherine Evans at cevans@sgcmail.com or (847) 391-1050.

Check out the June issue of Lawn & Garden Retailer to see the second finalist for the Merchandiser of the Year Award.