

FINALISTS ON FIRE

The judges are deep in deliberation to decide Lawn & Garden Retailer's 2016 Merchandiser of the Year. In the meantime, here's a look at the five garden centers still in the running, in no particular order. With the largest number of entries yet, the competition has been tight.

By Abby Kleckler

ANGIE'S GREENHOUSE AND PLANT CARE

Columbia Falls, Montana

Angie's Greenhouse and Plant Care staff created this bright display to draw people in and help promote marketing by word of mouth. Every year there's something a little different, so people will come in to see what's new. When customers first noticed this year's groovy bug, they would stop and say, "Slug bug!"

Russ and Angie Olsen created the display. Russ had the idea to sink the car crooked in the asphalt, while Angie had the idea to add the tire fence to showcase additional green goods.

Customers are often seen taking lots of pictures of the groovy bug and posing with it on a daily basis.



As Lawn & Garden Retailer's 2016 Merchandiser of the Year, the winner will receive the brand new Dramm 60114 RainSelect One Touch Hand Watering Display (MSRP \$2,365) and a \$500 Wholesale Gift Credit and a 15 percent discount for Braun Horticulture's 2016 Catalog offering (one time). Thank you to our sponsors.

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MERCHANDISER OF THE YEAR — FINALISTS

CHALILY PONDS AND GARDENS

St. Louis, Missouri

The staff at Chalily decided they wanted to make a display simulating what customers could really put together in their backyards. They wanted a place for customers to relax and unwind, as well as a place they could actually “experience” while at the store.

What is called “the courtyard” display was created when owner Joe Summers wanted to take a piece of the paved parking lot and turn it into something more beautiful. Under the mulch is simply asphalt.

Beginning with a few Adirondack chairs and some plants, it has advanced to create an inspirational outdoor living space. The staff continues to add to it and change it daily. Customers have enjoyed the area, coming in to sit and relax and try out the different chairs they can purchase just a few steps away. The fountains provide a buffer for the sounds of the bustling road nearby, while statuary helps to create what the staff refers to as a “home away from home.”



DISTINCTIVE GARDENS

Dixon, Illinois

Distinctive Gardens looks different than in years in past, largely because of what owners Bud and Lisa LeFevre are calling its new “Shop Story” concept. Each seasonal shop story focuses on one theme. They switch like art shows, unfold like good books, pop with project parties (more than a dozen events go with the show) and happen with community events.

The first shop story, “Transform,” ran April 7 to July 9 and focused on related plants, art and community activities. The theme spans from one room to the next, including an entryway with a center display that changes weekly. The second room features the tillandsia wall, which has tripled air plant sales since 2015.

Outside, greenhouse displays pick up on the theme, while a “Transform” community wall on the back of the greenhouse lets customer pick up a piece of chalk and leave their marks.

Distinctive Gardens explores digital continuity of its marketing and merchandising message with a new website and social media posts to videos to let people know about each shop story.



TALLAHASSEE NURSERIES

Tallahassee, Florida

Tallahassee Nurseries has many fun features that attract children and adults alike, including the garden center's latest addition, T-Rex. Owner Paul Brock found T-Rex on a January trip to AmericasMart in Atlanta, and he was delivered shortly before Easter.

Sporting Easter Bunny attire, he was an instant hit on Facebook, and customers soon came to have their pictures taken with "Bunny Rex."

He was then transformed into "Farmerasaurus," directing customers to a new veggie section. Later, as graduation time approached, Tallahassee Nurseries staff found and rented the largest cap and gown they could, and they had quite a few college students enjoy having their graduation photos taken with "Gradasaurus Rex."

For a brief time he was "Tennisasaurus Rex," donning his visor and posing with his tennis racket. In his latest getup, he is sporting all Dramm products, as "Hydrasaurus Rex," with the caption, "Keep your new plantings properly watered." The staff continues to have lots of fun thinking up new and fun costume ideas, and consumers seem to love it.



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MERCHANDISER OF THE YEAR — FINALISTS

INTOWN ACE HARDWARE

Decatur, Georgia

Once given the title as the “coolest Ace Hardware Store” by Ace Hardware corporation out of more than 4,800 stores nationwide, Intown Ace Hardware tries to live up to expectations with its displays. This spring featured a large line of metal yard art displayed throughout the entire garden center.

From the cows at the store’s new barn, to the chicken picnic at the oversized chairs, the art mixed with beautiful plants and pottery brought smiles to the faces of customers, and excitement and giggles from the children, according to staff.

Intown Ace Hardware has had great sales in this category, already placing multiple re-orders. Some of the pieces are planters, which give the opportunity for add-on sales, helping customers in choosing plant material. **LGR**

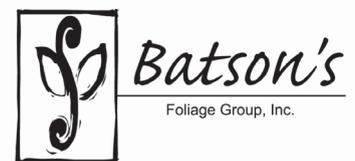


Make sure to check out next month’s issue of Lawn & Garden Retailer to see which garden center will win over our judges and claim bragging rights as Merchandiser of the Year.

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