

# Farm-to-Table



Barlow's in Sea Girt, New Jersey, hosted its first farm-to-table dinner in the greenhouse in February. Marketing coordinator Kayla Adamson talked with Lawn & Garden Retailer about the sell-out event and what they learned as they plan a second dinner this summer.

By Abby Kleckler



## HOW DID YOU DECIDE ON THIS TYPE OF EVENT?

We usually do an event in late winter, like February or March, to try to get people in our greenhouse when we typically wouldn't. The past few years we've been doing a symposium, and we just thought we needed to switch things up and do something more fun and exciting. Symposiums are great, but at the same time we wanted to keep up with the trends. I saw that there were a lot of farm-to-tables happening and that was something I've always to implement here at Barlow's. Stephen [Barlow] agreed and was like, "Yeah, let's do it!" We wanted to try to tie it in with gardening and that's why we tied it in with the Why Farming Matters event. Friday night was a workshop event and a movie, and then Saturday was the farm-to-table dinner, and we showed the movie as well. It wasn't just to do a farm-to-table dinner; it was to get people in our greenhouse, show them our plants and then also express awareness of shopping local, eating local and where our food comes from.

## WHAT WENT INTO THE EVENT?

We partnered with this restaurant that is just up the street from us, Fresh Kitchen. They source all their food fresh from local farms, so that was the premise of the whole event. There was a set cost per person from Fresh Kitchen, and that included all their servers, gratuity and everything, and then we had to cover our costs on the silverware, plates, napkins, tables, chairs, and a light we rented for our parking lot because it was an after-hours event (but looking back we probably didn't have to spend that money because the lights from our greenhouse were bright enough outside). Then, we made a bit on each ticket. Our goal was 60 people — we were nervous because we only have one bathroom — but the interest was so high we ended up capping the event at 76, in less than six weeks of marketing.



## WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO CHANGE FOR THE NEXT ONE?

I emailed everyone after the event asking for their feedback, and most of them were great and said they'd attend again. They loved the dinner and the long table format because a lot of people came as a couple, and then the way the farm-to-table was laid out you were interacting with everyone around you, so a lot of them became friends. We won't show a movie after the dinner again, just because it became a long night. We will do a cocktail hour or half hour at the beginning for people to mingle and to give them an opportunity to shop. We got coverage for alcohol at the event so it could be BYOB. We just want to keep the idea of shopping local and eating local going at the center of the event, and we also want to get people into our shop that might not usually come. We saw that when we did this farm-to-table dinner. We had people who were probably in their early 30s come, and I was really excited about that because that's the demographic I really want to get into our store. **LGR**

## HOW DID YOU MARKET THE EVENT?

We sold out a month before the event, which was great. We did a pre-sale, which it was \$5 dollars cheaper if they ordered it before Jan. 1, and we sold about 30 tickets just on that last presale day; it was crazy. We did the pre-sale for two weeks and then it went up to the normal price, which was \$75. A thing I found really useful is definitely posting as an event on Facebook. That's something we've been doing now with all of our events, and I think it gives it more exposure. On Facebook there's a feature that says "find events near you" and one woman typed in her zip code and our event came up, and that's how she found out about us and bought tickets to the event. We also sent it out in an email. We have a Dirty Glove Club, which is our gardening club of loyal customers that pay a fee to be in it, that we emailed it out to first, so they got first dibs the first day, and then the next day I sent it out to everyone else on our list. We had in-store signage, we had it on our website, and we did Facebook live videos. And then Fresh Kitchen also posted a couple times on their social media about it, and we had a signup in the Fresh Kitchen restaurant. Once we sold out they still kept the sign up just for awareness, and people kept asking if they could still buy tickets. I actually have a waiting list of people to call first for the next one, and I have at least 15 tickets that would've been sold if we could've done it.

