

Valentine's Day Dinner

Sometimes among the green goods and garden tools, romance can be found in the garden center. Benjamin J. Polzin, owner of Down to Earth Garden Center in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, shares how an annual Valentine's Dinner in the greenhouse has grown over the years.

By Teresa McPherson



HOW DID THE EVENT COME ABOUT, AND HOW HAS IT CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

Our Valentine's Dinner in the Greenhouse was the first dinner concept we hosted at Down to Earth. It was a logical first dinner, as it is such a busy dinner evening for couples. Plus, we thought the greenhouse would be a perfect romantic dining option for a couple looking for something unique.

Our first dinner hosted about 30 people; we wanted to do it right the first time and on a scale we could handle. It was an amazing event and continued to grow each year.

2019 was our fourth year hosting this dinner. We have expanded the dinner in the greenhouse concept to other times of the year with varying themes. We now have a live harpist playing for the evening, which was a nice addition. We also have our wine/alcohol license and are able to provide wine for an additional cost to attendees. The dinner is served in courses, so there is a continuous flow to the evening.

LET'S TALK LOGISTICS.

We have our own café in another part of our garden center. We do all of the food prep and cooking in there, and then create a staging/plating area in the greenhouse that is then served to each table. Our menu is planned a month or two in advance and with limited seating, which allows us to know how many people to expect for the evening.

We will now be booking 75 people for this year's dinner. We have three chefs/assistants and three servers for the event. Each of them is already a staff member of our café or greenhouse team. Set up and tear down is done by our team as well.

We have a great team, which makes everything run very smoothly. Many of our garden center staff help out as servers/cooks during the evening.



HOW IS AN EVENING EVENT DIFFERENT FROM ONE IN THE DAYTIME?

After hours events are always a little different from daytime ones. Since it is an evening event, we are able to close to the public and keep a much more intimate setting. We clear out an entire greenhouse for this one and get it all decorated ahead of time. Being that it is in February and in Wisconsin, we do have some temperature issues to deal with, since we have to haul the food between buildings, but we are prepared for that and have adapted.

Even though the space we hold it in has gotten larger, we still want it to feel like a greenhouse, so we move a bunch of our tropical plants into that house for the night and get everything decorated for the night. We also make custom succulent centerpieces for each table.

HOW DO YOU PUBLICIZE THE EVENT?

All of our events are publicized on our social media pages as well as our newsletter. We do not do any other paid advertising for them, as they typically sell out quickly. 🌱

