

## The Four C's of Christmas Trends



Tips and ideas IGCs can use to merchandise holiday items.



By Christina Salwitz

**A**fter what we've all been through this year, I might be suspicious of someone who honestly believes they KNOW what's in anyone's shopping brains for the 2020 holiday season. However, I'm also enough of a retail nerd to understand that it's super helpful to at least get some ideas that you can springboard from to suit your own region's tastes and have some sort of an attack plan for merchandising for a successful — and I hope thriving — end to a wild time in retail history.

We're all unfortunately familiar with what COVID-19 has done to possibly forever change retail as we know it. It changed how we merchandise and made us look at traffic patterns in ways we'd never imagined, but it also showed us just how life affirming a garden center delivery from an online purchase can be when many are isolated by choice or by necessity. So I won't go into any details on that. But it does foster larger conversations about what we're all expecting to see for holiday in stores and, from my research, I think the only answer is that it's going to vary widely.

Two garden centers 20 miles apart might potentially have a universe of difference in how they approach or even attempt to speak to trends. As with so many things this year, thankfully, we're all starting to fully understand that

there's room for everyone at the table, including trend setters and trend followers.

One overarching theme that came across loud and clear in my holiday trends research is that fashion themes and trends will have a bigger impact on Holiday 2020 than ever before. So there's a good starting point — grab a copy of Vogue's September issue while you plan your holiday vibe. (Typed with tongue firmly in cheek.)

Let's look at some macro level ideas that seem to be consistent across the board.

### The Four C's of Christmas Trends

**Cozy.** Nearly 75% of the country works from home now, and it's sounding more and more that this may remain our new normal. It's working for the most part and most economists don't see this returning to any kind of pre-COVID norms. So looking and feeling cozy is the TOP IDEA.

The nice thing about this idea is that it's conceivable to execute in a zillion affordable ways when it comes to the garden center: warm low-contrast tonal colors, fire-colored plants, fire pits, comfy outdoor living, cushy camping, comforting foods, stuffed creatures, soft textures in throw pillows, blankets, gloves, hats, décor and fabrics, candles, warm-toned pottery...

**Creative.** According to Pinterest, searches for all things Holiday 2020 were up nearly 200% starting as early as July. And it makes sense when you think about it; people aren't going on vacations, out to eat, etc. So, like home improvement

projects, money is going to holiday décor and creative gift making to make 2020 potentially suck a tiny bit less and help bring our families some joyful memories.

Creativity this season might best be summed up under the headline “Yes, it IS all about YOU,” meaning that, more than ever, customers are craving the personal touches, the things that can be one-of-a-kind or personalized.

These customers are also distinctly divided between two solid camps of “Classic, Clean and Contemporary” and the polar opposite of “More is MORE.” You will know who your people are; don’t try to be all things to all people. But that doesn’t mean that if you decide to go all in on the hot trend for tiny cache pots for houseplants you can’t have two separate displays and cover your bases.

**Community.** This is a tough one, but if you can find ways to help encourage this, customers are craving it! Obviously, we need to think and behave in pandemic-safe ways; however, you can suggest the idea of “community” in so many ways with your product mixes. From your book selections, to charity fundraisers through a gift-with-purchase program, holiday gift drives for ALL AGES, customer-driven donations to at-home school programs for beginning gardeners ... there are innumerable ways you can bring your community together through the garden center that we might never have considered before our new normal.

This year, community also means a large emphasis on buying local when we possibly can, too. If you can bring in items from local community vendors, it’s often a much more meaningful sale when you can share the story of that person in your community and how their products came to be in your store, too.



Kent East Hill Nursery offers locally made candles.

**Convenient.** Deliveries and online shopping are bigger than ever these days, but how can you differentiate yours? Imagine how excited a family with small children might be when YOUR delivery truck shows up looking like a giant present and with the family’s name on it?

What can you do to think out of the big-box store and make your convenience factor both personal and memorable? For some families struggling to work, homeschool and keep a somewhat normal schedule, your special holiday deliveries could take on entirely new meaning and garner your business some fabulous social media-worthy free marketing.



Molbak’s Garden and Home offers a bevy of holiday décor items.

## Themes from Two Local IGCs

For a more micro look at what I found at two of my own local independent garden centers, here’s a few themes and ideas for you to ponder and see if they might work for you too!

### The Christmas Garden

Holiday greenery, garland and trees will always be in style, but this year more than ever, going deep on ALL THINGS houseplants is a winner too. For the passionate “plant parent” in your life, consider not just the plants and pots, but the quality grow-light bulb that fits into a groovy decorator lamp and a book on “Growing Under Lights” to go with it. Maybe pebble trays that look nice enough to sit out in the living room with succulents or collectors tropicals.

Ryan Malmassari, manager at Kent East Hill Nursery in Kent, Washington, is banking on the indoor plant craze to continue through the holidays and into the foreseeable future in a strong way. Kent East Hill has devoted a large section of its indoor gift shop space to houseplants and accessories to popular success.

“We’re doing so well with everything in that category, we’re re-ordering stock much faster than normal,” he says. “It’s been huge for us on Instagram.”

### Pastel Fairy Tale

Pink, blue and green hued ice-cream tones are unique and can go two ways — chic and sophisticated or 80s girl band. Both are amazingly popular. The former look can be seen everywhere right now from HGTV home makeover shows like “Good Bones” who regularly take the uber popular “Etsy meets Pinterest 20-something vibe” that viewers go bonkers over or in the funky and fun category are the unicorn-esque look of sparkles, pop colors and the Lisa Frank vibe on the tree.

Molbak’s Garden and Home in Woodinville, Washington, meets this vibe head-on with a bevy of tree decorating options is glittery pastels for all tastes including some that look like true-to-life sprinkle donuts with pink icing.

### Active Christmas

There’s no denying that by choice or necessity, we’re all walking, running, hiking, biking, camping and just plain

trekking like never before. Molbak's truly capitalized on this hot trend beginning last year, but this year, it seems to be much more meaningful when it comes to gift giving. With everything from a very cool selection of books with titles like "The Creaky Knees Guide, 75 Best Easy Hikes" and "Urban Trails Seattle" all displayed in a "Camp Molbak's" theme, they know their demographic well.



Molbak's has a variety of books for the outdoorsperson on every gift list.

### White Christmas

This one has been percolating for a few years, but I kind of feel a crescendo coming for the full-on white Christmas.

From rustic whites, pale Swedish woods and natural accents with a barn and white owl feeling, to sophisticated looks with a glittery, fluffy, over-the-top white-on-white on silver chic style, with thick throws and candlelight. Both have their place in this year's trends lineup.

### Quarantine Baking/Cooking

If you sell books in your gift shop, this trend will net you yummy success! Pairing gift books with cookware, bakeware, drinkware, all the wares, linens, and obviously the jams. Jellies, cookies, hot sauces, spice mixes, etc., with fresh herbs will net you popular sales ideas. Even better, pair up with local vendors who will host tables of their goods on a Saturday and make it event worthy with a food truck, too!

This is the category to double down on with the newest ideas. If the bread-baking craze is still booming in your area, run with it in over-the-top ways — a baked bread knot contest judged by the Boy Scouts! If your area features some other special food group, go BIG with it as a holiday specialty and build a safe community event around it. 🍌

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# Fraser Fir Christmas Trees

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