



# Trends in Outdoor Living

Simplicity and affordability are two outdoor living trends for 2021.

By Teresa McPherson

**T**om Partipilo, outdoor living buyer at Lurvey Garden Center in Des Plaines, Illinois, says IGC customers want to buy products that will bring warmth to an area for family and friends to gather around — but will be doing so within their means. Here, he shares his thoughts on merchandising outdoor living products and his predictions for 2021.

**Lawn & Garden Retailer:** What are your top sellers in the outdoor living category?

**Tom Partipilo:** This year has created more customers looking for ways to enjoy their outdoor spaces. In a big year, our top sellers were pottery; umbrellas and bases; Outdoor Interiors eucalyptus and teak outdoor furniture; fountains; trellises; and fire features and chimineas.

**L&GR:** What is not selling as much? Why?

**Partipilo:** Even though customers were happy to spend money on their personal spaces, they were still aware of their pocketbooks. From year to year, we try to offer our customers something new to see; this year we tried a couple of higher-end products that didn't sell as well as we hoped, informing us that even though customers were ready to spend money, they also wanted to keep within their budget.

**L&GR:** What's trending for 2021 in outdoor living?

**Partipilo:** Simplicity and affordability seems to be the trend for 2021. Our plan is to continue to offer affordable products that create inviting spaces. In this uncertain time, we are aware that customers are prepared to buy products that will bring warmth to an area for family and friends to gather around, but will be doing so within their means. Our plan is to keep it simple and affordable while providing high-quality and interesting products.

One of the simplest and most affordable ways to improve a space is to purchase a beautiful planter and fill it with colorful annuals.

**L&GR:** How do you differentiate yourself from big box stores selling outdoor living products?

**Partipilo:** At Lurvey, we make an effort to curate together products our customers can't find just anywhere. If a big box store carries the product, the customer will

most likely go purchase it there. That being said, we do our best to treat customers as if they are coming into our home, offering design advice and information on products they “can't live without.”

**L&GR:** What tips do you have for other IGCs on how to merchandise outdoor living products?

**Partipilo:** When merchandising our outdoor living products we do our best to create vignettes showcasing the entire outdoor living package. From top (umbrellas, lighting) to bottom (outdoor rugs, tables, pillows, tableware). Show customers new and exciting ways to set up outdoor spaces giving them the ideas they can then use to recreate in their homes.

**L&GR:** Do you hold events on-site as part of your outdoor living marketing efforts? What's been the most successful?

**Partipilo:** On-site events and classes have been a large part of our marketing and success. In a normal year, we hold events on a monthly basis, it not only helps bring the community together but it helps us to get to know our customers' needs and wants.

One of the most successful events we provide is our Kid's Club. This is a monthly club that focuses on children spending more time outdoors, interacting with their outdoor environments. Unfortunately, due to Covid we have had to cut back on many of these for obvious safety reasons.

**L&GR:** What advice would you give to other IGCs looking to expand their outdoor living selection?

**Partipilo:** My advice to garden centers looking to expand their outdoor selection is to take a look at the entire outdoor living picture, thinking top to bottom. What products are going to create the look customers will want to replicate in their home? Find products that are unique, that can't be found at your local big box stores.

Customers want to be directed; they want the help in creating intimate spaces that bring people together. Also, listen to what customers need, they will let you know what they like and don't like. Lastly, don't be afraid to try new things, keep customers interested and involved, our job is to keep them interested and coming back. 🐦