

# SPREAD YOUR Wings

By Teresa McPherson

The pandemic brought on a new wave of birdwatchers — here are some tips from two garden centers who have been able to ride the wave.



**D**uring the early days of the pandemic, many people found solace in being outdoors, whether gardening, hiking or birdwatching. In fact, the 2020 Great Backyard Bird Count broke more records and attracted more participants than ever before.

Lawn & Garden Retailer recently spoke with independent garden centers Herbein's Garden Center and Rolling Green Nursery about how they've increased their birding offerings.

## Herbein's Garden Center Emmaus, Pennsylvania

Customer demand can often nudge

a garden center to expand its offerings. In the case of Herbein's Garden Center, marketing and event coordinator Dawnette Fetterman says, "We realized that, when an increasing number of customers were entering the store asking for specific birding items that we hadn't currently carried, it was time to up our game. With the amount of people staying at home, changing an interior room into office space, they were looking for ways to attract birds to their yards."

Fetterman says birding sales in 2020 were flat, "which is remarkable because in Pennsylvania, most garden centers were only permitted curbside

pickup during spring. That in itself is what I believe hurt the sales. Gardening and birding are visual hobbies; when you can't see the items (when you're so used to), it makes it a little more difficult to put that item at the top of the list.

"Sales this year have gone back up to normal and we expect it to rise throughout the remainder of the year," she says.

Fetterman says Herbein's has gradually been increasing its birding department the last few years.

"We have added our own brand of basic bird mix that is produced locally," she says. "We carry our local Audubon



Some of the birdhouses available at Herbein's Garden Center.

Society's Bird Handbooks, locally made birdhouses and gourd houses, and we draw people in with great pricing on suet cakes.”

Top sellers in the garden center include major brands like Droll Yankee, Perky Pet, Lyric, Cole's and Nature's Way, among others.

“Our Pine Tree Suet Cakes are a huge seller at just 99 cents apiece,” she says, “but I would say that our house label basic bird feed and the Lyric label sell extremely well also. Feeders are selling evenly across the board, with hummingbird feeders and food being a hot item right now.”

Fetterman says they've found success promoting birding merchandise on social media. “I follow several local birding groups and keep up with current news that I enjoy sharing in our social media and email newsletters,” she says. “We promote pollinator-friendly and fruiting plants, trees, and shrubs during the proper time of year. The key is to market at the right time. And in this business, when it's all-hands-on-deck from April on, it can get a little hairy with promoting. But with our email marketing, we can get the items out in front of a lot of people in a short amount of time.”

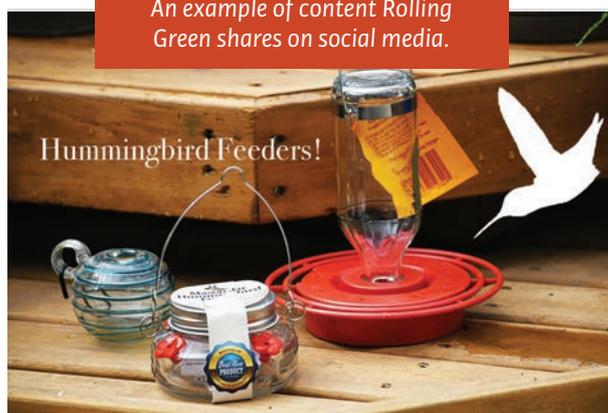
She says finding enough attendees to make a workshop worthwhile has been difficult, but of the programs they've offered, their best-attended seminars have been the ones on birding and creating space for them.

“Speaker Barbara Malt, vice president of the Lehigh Valley Audubon Society, has been incredibly giving of her knowledge and would share her personal experiences with us, showing slides of before-and-after images of her yard and giving inspiration to everyone,” she says. “She is simply an incredible human being.”

For garden centers looking to improve their birding merchandise sales, Fetterman says they should “know what's going on locally and what people are interested in. Definitely follow trends and be flexible with what merchandise you provide. So many new people are getting more active in the backyards. You have some customers that will want your basic run-of-the-mill items and some that may want to go crazy, out-of-the-box, and vibrant. Market to everyone.”



Rolling Green Nursery's  
birding section.



Hummingbird Feeders!

## Rolling Green Nursery Greenland, New Hampshire

Rolling Green Nursery is relatively new to birding, says Beth Simpson, co-owner. “In the last couple of years, a really popular birding store, Nature’s Outpost, closed when the owner retired. That opened up the birding market to us.”

She says their best-selling bird seed is 25-pound bags of Meaties, a partially hulled sunflower seed that the birds love. “We also do OK with a Fruit and Berry and Cardinal Food, and mealworms when we can get them. For suets, we sell Insect and High Energy, Hot Pepper suets, as well as Nutsie cakes in a couple of sizes.

“For feeders, we sell Pest Off squirrel-proof feeders, Birds Choice Oriole feeders, and hummingbird feeders, especially Best-One from Texas, and a small Mason jar feeder is doing very well this year.

“For several years, we have sold Parasol hand-blown glass hummingbird feeders, which make great gifts. They are made in Mexico and I have visited the store in San Miguel de Allende a couple of times, which is magical — buzzing with hummers in their courtyard filled with a lot of feeders.

“For birdhouses, we buy some from locals, but also Ebersol (Amish made), Nature Creations and Birds Choice.”

Simpson says they keep an eye on what’s being sold at the local box stores and do something different, but still well priced.

She says the store’s birding offerings extend beyond seeds and houses. “We sell a lot of Nature and bird themed giftware — especially Earth Sky + Water notecards and Mary Lake-Thompson’s dish towels.

“Prior to feeders and seed, we have always had good success with bird baths in ceramic, granite and concrete.

This year, I purchased some fiberstone bird bath tops to help fill the need for replacement tops in a mix of colors.”

For promotion, she says they have someone in-house who manages the website, weekly eblast and social media (Facebook and Instagram).

“Lisa Corder is also an avid gardener and new birder and she is a wonderful photographer — I think she has helped the birding dept a lot with her posts. We also start in the fall with a ‘gardening for the birds’ display outside with berry-producing shrubs and trees — winterberry, blueberries, junipers and crabapples, and plants for birdcover, with a feeder and suet feeder.”

As for in-person promotion, she says they promoted the Backyard Bird Count this year. They haven’t done any in-store events but they host a Winter Farmers’ Markets from November thru February, where they sell birding products. 🍷