

INSPIRE NEW TRADITION

"For every year the Christmas tree,
Brings to us all both joy and glee
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
Much pleasure doth thou bring me!"
— Original lyrics from "O Christmas Tree"

By Ingridi Liss and Margo Tantau

The Christmas tree is one of the most popular and cherished traditions of the Christmas season. In fact, each year 35-40 million live trees are purchased and decorated in the United States alone. Why do Americans love decorating so? According to recent consumer focus groups we conducted with women across the country, one participant summed it up by saying "Decorations are half the excitement of Christmas!" These women also consider holiday decorating to be a gateway to honoring traditions they celebrated as children. But they don't want to recreate their mothers' trees. Sure, they'll continue using special keepsakes year after year, but it's really about honoring the past and infusing it with a new twist to showcase their own individual style and personality.

During the focus groups, the women we spoke with also confirmed something that we've believed all along — that they look to you, the retailer, to lead, educate, show and, above all, inspire them. Your selection and

presentation show her what to do, how to be unique, how to mix and match and how to create her own signature look. She doesn't want to copy you entirely, but to mix and match with the items she has at home, both to watch her budget and to create her own unique look at home.

INSPIRATION

So how does this translate into more customers through your doors and more cash registers ringing? Try a new twist on the Christmas tree tradition by inspiring your customers' creativity and personal taste, while mixing in items she likely already has at home. To help get your customers' creative juices flowing (and get people shopping), consider setting up some of your own creative Christmas tree displays. Here are a few ideas to help you get started.

Decorate by hobby or interest. Try some of the most popular hobbies — gardening or sports, for example — and create a tree full of not only garden- or sports-themed ornaments, but also everyday items that represent the hobby. ▶



Top: Bright tree. Bottom: Scrapbooking tree. (Photos courtesy of Midwest)

MERCHANDISING

For a gardening tree, try seed packets, gardening gloves, spades and trowels, even a watering can. For a sports tree, try items such as baseballs, a baseball mitt tree topper, even a pair of cleats. It's a new twist that will catch your customers' attention, and it's easy to replicate at home.

Decorate by room. Many fami-

lies decorate more than one tree. The most common rooms for a second (and even third and fourth) tree are the dining room, kids' bedrooms and rec room. A wine-themed tree is a perfect fit for the dining room. Besides wine label and grape ornaments, use real corks, vines, organics, grapes and even a

wine or champagne bucket to hold the tree (why not add a bottle of wine, too?).

For a child's room, toy-themed ornaments are great, but pepper in a few real toys for a little surprise. Repurpose a jump rope as garland, wooden blocks as ornaments, and a toy top as a tree topper. For the kitchen, coffee is a

great theme. Think ornaments that are coffee-related and in shades of brown, mixed with real coffee packages, coffee mugs, spoons, etc.

Decorate by color. Red and green are classic and will always be a part of Christmas, but let a new color be your guide this year. Try decorating even one

TRENDY CHRISTMAS THEMES

Every year around Christmas I like to visit as many garden centers as possible. It puts me in the spirit of the season and helps me learn all of the latest and greatest trends in Christmas décor. As you can read from the adjoining article, themed trees are gaining popularity. Garden center merchandisers are really doing a great job at picking themes to showcase the up and coming trends. Some of the more popular themes I've seen are:

Bright colors. As you read in the article, bright colors are really making their way through the retail industry. Everything from clothes to home décor to Christmas decorations. Bright pinks, greens, oranges and yellows are just flying off the shelves. People are taking the red and green traditional decorations of stars, ornaments and stockings and giving them a new splash of color. Making Christmas pop a little more with a contemporary flair.

Black Tie. "Traditional" has been thrown out the window with this trend. Black and white ornaments, tree toppers, Santas and more really hit the mark this past Christmas for garden centers. This color combination added a nice clean and cool look to the red and green tradition. Little additions are even being made, such as Christmas-

decorated penguins and polar bears, to give consumers some characters to display rather than the typical reindeer.

The Red Hat Society. Hopefully you have all heard of the Red Hat Society and are carrying merchandise for it because this trend is huge, and it really worked at Christmas. According to the official Red Hat Society Web site, "The Red Hat Society is a women's movement changing the perception of aging women in the United States and around the world. This growing organization of women is uniting under the umbrella of a Red Hat to have fun and bond in sisterhood as they travel through life together." This past Christmas catered to these women. Red hat ornaments and miscellaneous décor filled garden centers. There were Red Hat trees surrounded with all sorts of gift items that tied in, and the retailers said those items would just fall off the trees (excuse the pun).

Pink Extravaganza. Pink is the new black or at least the new red and green for Christmas. It was like Valentine's Day got confused and showed up early. Pink is no longer the color that only little girls wear. There were some really nice, tasteful displays that even made the men's heads turn, and it was all for the Christmas season.

— Catherine Evans

tree with a new color twist, for example playful brights. We've noticed brights as a color trend this year, and on the backdrop of a green Christmas tree, brights really pop. We've also noticed that oversized ornaments are very popular this year, so a tree filled with bright, oversized ornaments will be sure to get noticed — and purchased.

Decorate by character. Many Americans already collect Christmas characters such as Santas and snowmen, so why not give them a new way to display them — and some new characters to add to their collection. Fill a tree with one character in many different, new designs and in different sizes for impact. In our 2005 holiday collection, we've noticed that classic icons such as angels and stars — with a new twist, like a new material or finish — are hot sellers this year. Especially popular are those designed with shiny finishes and materials, like pewter, glitter, glass and glaze.

Decorate as a scrapbook. The scrapbooking craze has swept the country, so why not piggyback on this trend come Christmastime?

Create a scrapbook tree of family memories using photos (both framed and unframed), postcards and little mementos. Sell frame ornaments, garland and ribbon to help customers bring this tree to life.

Decorate with a non-traditional tree. Try other styles of trees instead of the standard live evergreen. Try things like a silver tinsel tree for a retro theme, feather trees for a vintage look, or deciduous tree branches for an outdoor or wildlife theme.

DESIGN EXTRAS

To help make purchasing ornaments and garland easy for customers, place baskets of those ornaments you used on the tree under and around each tree. This approach will make it easy



for customers to shop from the tree without removing ornaments, so it will also help you save time by keeping your displays in tact.

The bottom line: Let creativity be your guide. With a little wire and lots of imagination, you can put just about anything into your Christmas tree displays — and inspire your customers to take a new twist on tradition that is just right for them. 🎄

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