

BIRDING

Three garden centers discuss what gets customers flocking to their wildlife departments.

By Abby Kleckler

There is no doubt birdwatching is an old pastime, but that's not to say it is outdated. In the U.S., more than 68 million people say they watch wildlife for recreation around their homes, according to the latest U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service study.

These 68 million people are not all males or all females, they are not all Baby Boomers or Millennials, and they are not all birding experts.

The following three garden centers have all given their birding departments some extra attention.

One-of-a-kind products, well-attended events, unique displays and employee expertise help start the birding conversation with customers at their businesses.

HILLERMANN NURSERY & FLORIST

Washington, Missouri



At Hillermann Nursery & Florist, it is not just a birding department, but a complete wildlife section.

"We encourage butterflies, bug houses, bats and any other critters that help in pollination," says Sandi Hillermann McDonald, president of Hillermann Nursery & Florist. "We promote song birds as great insect eaters and promote the health of frogs, toads, bugs, bats and butterflies for pollination purposes."



Hillermann McDonald and her team offer workshops, seminars and make-and-take events in as many departments as possible. They have at least two kids birding events during the year and support the Missouri River Bird Observatory. The nonprofit has come to the store for bird tagging events.

"It is interesting to see them put up huge nets along our woods line on our property and catch birds in flight heading to the feeders," Hillermann McDonald says. "The birds are then brought over to the crowd where we get a great close-up look at the bird for identification, then they band the bird and release it."



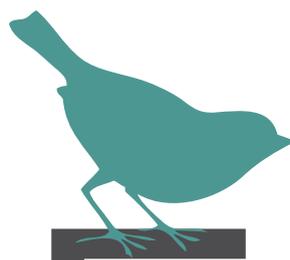
A "Bird of the Week" is featured in the company's newsletter, and corresponding sales bring customers into the store.

"Bird of the Week came about two years ago when I was looking for articles to put into my weekly newsletter, besides talking about houseplants and starting seeds," Hillermann McDonald says. "It is a way to keep nature front and center year-round."



Hillermann Nursery & Florist prides itself in carrying high-quality seeds, seed mixes and suet types, without fillers.

"We even developed a 'Bernie's Blend' birdseed mix that is named after my dad who is a huge birder," Hillermann McDonald says. "It has been our No. 1 seller for many years."



BRIEFS

TUMALO GARDEN MARKET

Bend, Oregon



Many products at Tumalo Garden Market have a strong connection to nature, can't be found anywhere else and have customers requesting more.

"The fly-through feeders are made out of lodgepole by a guy who's between 70 and 80 years old," says Michael Ludeman, owner of Tumalo Garden Market. "I sell out of this product every year."

Ludeman says he centers his business around the birds and the bees because they're interesting, require attention and are fun to have around the nursery. "The idea is to set up the experience, so people get interested in birding and see there's support products to get them what they're looking for," he says.

This idea, and help from Mother Nature, led to a bird fence. "We had a heavy windstorm with a lot of blow down of the trees, so I put some fence posts in and started weaving branches into a big fence system with very little wire connecting," Ludeman says. "I'll get up to 100 birds in the bird fence. People sit and watch the birds and want to create these fences in their backyards."

TAGAWA GARDENS

Centennial, Colorado



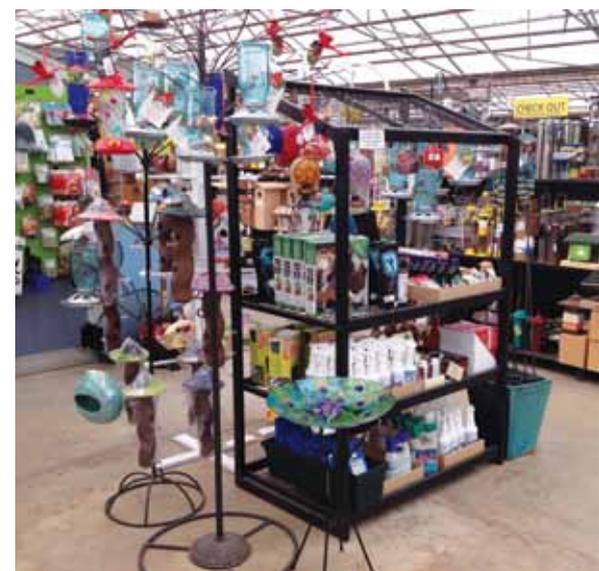
The Seed Shack houses 5-pound or larger bags of seed and suet. The enclosed space means Tagawa Gardens can shut the door at night to keep any raccoons or mice out.

Along the back outside wall of the shack are hooks and replacement pieces and parts for feeders and birdhouses, including branch hangers and predator guards.



Tagawa hosts one of its most popular events, the Bird and Nature Festival, in February, which is National Bird Feeding Month. The day includes classes, family activities and opportunities to talk with state park and Wildlife Federation representatives.

"We have a local raptor education group, HawkQuest, that actually flies a hawk through our greenhouse," says Beth Zwinak, manager at Tagawa Gardens. "We get really nice crowds."



The birding department at Tagawa Gardens is right outside the annuals department and on the way to the restroom – not nearby though – so it gets a lot of foot traffic throughout the year. Some hot items include birdhouses, nesting material, butterfly houses, ladybug houses, bat boxes and feeders.

"Hummingbird feeders are huge in Colorado from April to September, so we always have a really large selection of hummingbird feeders," Zwinak says. "We have handmade ones all the way down to beginner, plastic ones." **LGR**