

UNDER WRAPS



Starting with last month's gift market in Atlanta, the coming months are the key time to buy for 2008's holiday season. We take a look at some of the hottest gift trends out there.

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Every winter, garden centers are stocked to the rafters with ornaments, lighting, holiday-themed trinkets and fresh greenery in anticipation of a busy Christmas season. Those items are perfect for sprucing up your customers' houses and creating a festive atmosphere, but when it comes to holiday giving, customers will be looking for garden-oriented gifts their recipients can treasure and use during the rest of the year, too.

The four categories below are gift trends we've noticed in the past few months during garden center tours and gift markets — as well as observations we've made as consumers. Read on for ideas you can take into the coming holiday buying season.

Child's Play

Gardening isn't just for adults. There are few things kids love more than digging their hands

into the earth, watching flowers bloom and spending some up-close and personal time with nature's abundant creepy crawlers. Take a look at your inventory: Does your garden center's merchandise cater just to mom and dad, or have you made some room for colorful, kid-sized and fun gardening tools for those budding gardeners?

Some garden centers designate a special "kid zone" in their stores to draw attention to their children's display and encourage your customers to offer their children something different than the latest Barbie doll or video game. Kids' tool sets, containing essentials like shovels, hoes, leaf rakes, aprons, and gloves specifically designed to fit and appeal to a child, make great gifts. Make sure they're also safe and easy to use to minimize any gardening "boo-boos." Children, with their vivid imaginations and zest for life, might also appreciate items such as a bird or butterfly feeder that lets them invite a slice of the wild

GIFT TRENDS



Kids' gardening sets, such as this one by EJ Enterprises, are a hands-on alternative to pricey video games that keep children cooped up inside all day. Garden gifts for kids are also great for helping families spend time together.

into their gardens. There's also the opportunity to include educational items, like how-to gardening books, interactive CDs or scientific kits that gives their curiosities free rein.

As you well know, parents — like many of your customers are — love pampering their children, especially around the holidays. Why not be ready to help them share their hobby with their kids? Who knows, the munchkins might grow up to be your best customers 10 years down the road. For some product ideas, check out www.kidsgardening.org.

Garden Spa

For the hardworking hobby gardeners who love floral aromas to the backyard warriors who work themselves into a frenzy every weekend, with blisters and calluses as their battle scars, soothing lotions and scented candles can make a great gift basket or serve as excellent stocking stuffers.

Some garden centers are already picking up on this trend, stocking products from Crabtree & Evelyn that are specifically tailored for the gardener; luxurious lotions, hand soaps and sugar scrubs from Thymes; and heavy-duty moisturizers from Green Beaver. After a long day trekking through the backyard mud and muck in that old pair of Crocs, tired feet could be begging for an at-home pedicure, or at least a soak in a bath of warm water and a quick slick of lotion.

And who doesn't love a long, hot bubble bath in a room filled with soft light and scented candles? Yankee Candles are always a hit — shoppers at the company's Massachusetts flagship stock up by the cartload — but WoodWick by Virginia Candle Company and clean-burning soy-wax options from Beanpod Candles could offer something a little different for the candle aficionado on your customers' lists. Consider scents like Biscotti and Linen from WoodWick and Beanpod's holiday scents, such as Icicles and Hot Chocolate.

Good to Go

Many customers find themselves with an overwhelming stack of invitations to holiday get-togethers, from fancy adult soirées to kid-oriented cookie-decorating parties — with so many events to attend, your customers will inevitably be looking for quick presents to offer their



Some garden centers are already offering a wide variety of lotions, scrubs and candles to their customers. These products can be a perfect gift for the hard-working gardener looking to wind down after a long day in the yard.

hosts. Help them ditch the clichéd bottle of wine for a classy, ready-to-give garden gift. ▶

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CHRISTMAS RETAILER

GIFT TRENDS

Mahoney's Garden Center in Winchester, Mass., offered miniature Christmas tree sets in a tasteful gift bag during the 2007 holiday season: a small potted evergreen tree, 12 tiny ornaments

and a string of 20 electric lights to brighten things up. This could be a great gift for families with younger children or even coworkers during an office gift exchange.

And for customers who are tired of giving the classic red poinsettia, dress it up with Proven Winners' DiamondPoint combination: 'Diamond Frost' euphorbia, a top seller from Proven Winners, mixes in underneath the traditional poinsettia's bracts to fill in where its spindly legs would otherwise show. The result is a beautiful mix of color and texture that's sure to impress. And with a higher price point than traditional poinsettias alone, DiamondPoint is certain to add a little holiday cheer to your bottom line as well.

The Gift that Keeps on Giving

Ever had a customer run into your store the day before Christmas Eve, wandering the aisles for a last-minute gift, only to find that nothing seemed quite right? Well, if you had gift cards in stock, as many garden centers now do, you might not have missed that sale. Not to mention, you might have had a new customer walk into your doors. Make the right impression on them, and that newbie could

become a loyal, repeat shopper at your garden center.

For the person who already has everything (or is infamous for returning gifts), gift cards are the perfect stocking stuffer this holiday season. Try to offer gift cards in a range of prices, so people can choose to spend as little or as much as they want. Also, feel free to be as creative as you would like with the design of your gift cards. A unique, inviting design can be all the temptation the cardholder needs to go check out if anything else in your garden center is equally irresistible.

Gift cards are great for business because they give your customers the flexibility and options they need to make that perfect purchase. For garden novices who might not have any idea what to buy first, the gift card could be the needed push to get them through your doors and exploring all of your wonderful merchandise. As automatic sales, gift cards are also a great boost to your bottom line — a nice little Christmas present for any business owner.

LearnMore!

For more information related to this article, go to www.lgrmag.com/lm.cfm/lg020807



Top: Mahoney's Garden Center in Winchester, Mass., sold mini Christmas tree kits during the 2007 holiday season. Each kit contained a miniature tree, ornaments and lights. (Photo: Stacy Eaton, Border Concepts) **Bottom:** Proven Winners' DiamondPoint combination is a striking gift that combines 'Diamond Frost' euphorbia with a traditional poinsettia plant, creating a beautiful mix of colors and textures.



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We had amazing growth in our sales this last Xmas season of this wonderful "green" line of charming critters transformed from the Buri palm tree. The genius of the creators combined with the ever-growing skills of the artisans make this a unique and lasting line.



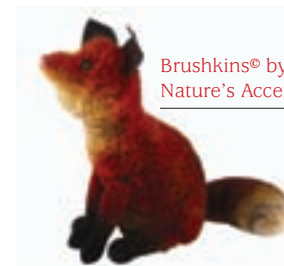
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