

CHRISTMAS 101

Welcome to *Lawn & Garden Retailer's* 1st annual "Christmas Retailer" where we will help you learn the ins and outs of the second largest selling season for garden centers, and maybe even a little bit more.

We all spend so much time trying to figure out ways to make spring better, make the plants last longer, make the employees happier, sell more hanging baskets, etc., but what about the other big season? What about Christmas? It's a huge part of the year for so many garden centers; however, it's not really talked about much at shows or in trade magazines, so we decided to develop a special section to help retailers learn a little more about it.

I travel quite a bit to gift shows throughout the year, and do you know where I see most of my garden center friends when I get there? Not the garden floors, not at the local hotel bar, in the Christmas manufacturers' showrooms, frantically checking off all of the new products they want to carry for the next winter holiday season.

SEASON JUSTIFICATION

The following are some recent facts from the National Retail Federation regarding the Christmas season:

- There was a 5.7-percent increase in holiday sales in 2004, making 2004 the best Christmas selling season since 1999.
- Gift cards totaled 8 percent of total sales.
- High-end goods (something we know a lot about) out-performed the averages.

• Discount stores had a harder time this year than in years past.

Yes, the majority of merchandise for the Christmas holiday season is hard goods, and the reason most of you got into the business was to sell plants. I know you're wondering if Christmas is really a good fit for you. But who else can make it so successful? We all know that big boxes are lacking your design component. They just throw the product up on the wall and call it a day. How many of you have display trees? How often have customers walked in the door and said, "I want that tree"? Not often, but oh the inspiration you've given; besides, it does happen sometimes.

Some people say Christmas is a waste; there is so much effort put into such a small time period, and there is too much merchandise to purchase. Well, that could be said of spring too, yet everyone seems to be ready for that part of the year. Why not add on or expand an extra selling season?

We plan on helping you out with trend information, how the past seasons have done, new and exciting poinsettia information and more. Let us do the talking while you sit back and take it all in. Keep in mind we are all out to make money, and the more ways we can do that the better. Plus Christmas is a great time to throw an open house with food and drinks; you can bring Santa and most importantly you can go to Hawaii as soon as the season is over and not feel guilty about getting a massage on the beach because you made so much extra money!

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