

# KEEP IT GOING



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In the good old days of retailing, consumers flooded into garden centers at the first sign of spring, paid good margins, bought the majority of their annual purchases and returned only sporadically for maintenance needs. True, those were a hard couple of months, but then it was over. And the payoff for all that hard work was 80-plus percent of annual profits, allowing seasonal retailers to flourish and permanents some breathing room.

Alas, those days are gone forever. More and more, retailers are struggling to create additional revenue, extend peak seasons, even create another peak season. Successful garden centers are now cultivating (pardon the pun) the notion of gardening as a year-round hobby, this means not only sustaining product and customer interest through late summer, fall and winter, but also preparing your garden center for multiple peaks — with at the very least late summer, Halloween and fall added to the more traditional spring and Christmas peaks.

## STEP BY STEP

The easiest part of this year-round formula is product. Consult the wholesale growers you work with regularly; let them know that you want season-specific product that will give you color all year. Since these are off-peak seasons for growers, most will be happy to have the order. A good grower should know which plants can withstand the hot, dry conditions of late summer and which can take an early frost (if you need help identifying fall plants, turn to page 44 for my article on the new fall color programs). Start as early as possible to identify varieties that will work best in each season, and place a detailed order for particular varieties. You'll also want to shop the gift shows for the latest and greatest seasonal items. More information on the shows can be found on page 6.

Next comes the hard part...marketing. It won't do you any good to have a garden center full of flowering plants in August if your customers don't know about it. Use direct mail, local advertising, your store's marquee, whatever vehicle has worked in the past; just get a very focused message out to your customers that your store has season-specific color in stock. Educational programs during the spring rush and again during your target season would also not be a bad idea.

The last step is for many the hardest, but it's the one that will have the most lasting effect. Evaluate your store, your philosophy and your employees. Most garden centers are designed for the spring peak, with lots of outdoor, uncovered selling space dedicated to plants and a much

smaller indoor space for gifts and hardgoods. This design will obviously not work in inclement weather. Turn to page 14 for part III in Judy Sharpton's "Designed to Sell" series for some ideas about off-season store design. As for you and your employees, sustaining multiple peaks is difficult. It means having a larger staff for longer periods of time, maintaining a year-round selling attitude and learning several new seasons. Expect resistance because it won't be easy. But it will pay off, and not only in increased revenue.

Having multiple interactions with customers each year will result in more loyalty, which will result in higher purchases and more purchases...that is, if the experience is everything the customer wants it to be.

*Bridget L. White*

## Coming next month...

**Retail Buyer's Guide**  
A listing of vendor companies, their contact information and the products they carry.

**Visual Product Directory**  
An extended product section with pictures and descriptions of this year's best new products.

# LAWN & GARDEN Retailer

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## Subscription Information

Lawn & Garden Retailer magazine is published seven times a year in January, February, March, June, July, August and September by Scranton Gillette Communications, Inc., 380 E. Northwest Highway, Suite 200, Des Plaines, IL 60016-2282. Telephone: (847) 391-1000; Fax: (847) 390-0408. Subscription rates in the U.S. are \$30 per year (Canada and Mexico are \$50 and all other countries are \$60 payable in U.S. currency). Reproduction of contents is forbidden. Copyright 2002.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Circulation Department, Lawn & Garden Retailer, 380 E. Northwest Highway, Suite 200, Des Plaines, IL 60016-2282. PRINTED IN USA.