

*You already know that any time you can bring people into your store it means more money, but have you thought about using more than plants and fertilizer as bait? Many garden centers now carry home décor and gift items as a regular part of their offering. What about other items? What about products that are not usually considered garden products...things like pet supplies and gourmet food? These kinds of ancillary categories are proving profitable for garden centers around the country.*

*"Developing Markets," a monthly series that will appear in each issue of Lawn & Garden Retailer, will profile eight of these potential new markets, giving insight into the health of the market, relating how other garden centers have mastered the category and profiling some of the best new products in the category.*

**January: Pet Supplies**  
**February: Gourmet Food**  
**March: Tabletop**  
**April: Linens**  
**June: Stationary**  
**July: Personal Care**  
**August: Jewelry**  
**November: Collectables**

**P**ottery Barn, Crate & Barrel, Williams-Sonoma — you'd have to have been living under a rock the last five years or so not to know who these companies are. Stores like these have really made an impact in the upscale housewares market, even making housewares a staple in U.S. consumer spending.

According to the International Housewares Association's (IHA) 2004 State-of-the-Industry Report, U.S. consumer spending on housewares has increased an average of 4.9 percent annually over the past five years. On average, in 2003 U.S. households spent \$578 each on housewares (up 8.2 percent from

2002), more than on fruits and vegetables (\$563) or dairy products (\$335). Can you believe consumers are spending more on housewares than vegetables? Granted it's only a few dollars more, and the price per item for vegetables is much lower than an average item for the home. But, it's still something to think about.

The entire housewares market is getting bigger and better and going strong thanks to specialty stores such as the aforementioned. And what do all of them carry successfully? Tabletop. They have the right idea. The IHA report also found that tabletop is the 5th fastest-growing category in housewares, accounting for 8.7

percent of direct-to-retail sales dollars. It lost to a pretty elite list of categories: household electronics; cook and bake-ware; kitchen electronics; and space organizers, closets and clothing care.

So what does the tabletop category encompass? Everyone has their own list. Some say it is anything that can go on top of a table — vases, frames, etc. Others say mostly dinnerware (bowls, plates, flatware, cups, platters, pitchers, etc.) You can make your own list, but for this article, we'll go with the latter.

## TABLETOP AND GARDEN CENTERS?

Finally, after years of promoting the idea, con-



Wight's Home and Garden goes for a theme when displaying tabletop.

sumers, as an "c living s other ro pretty p rooms a it: peop china a TV tray dining m mal dip set of d now loc nerwar thing to of their where c looking ucts? TH

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## PROF

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choice than there's ever been in the history of mankind, and the marketing noise is deafening."

There are more manufacturers of tabletop out there than I could gather, and so many of these manufacturers make lines that would be perfect for garden centers. Anything with a garden motif or a flower pattern would be an obvious choice, and there is lots of that. But you should also consider anything bright and festive. Heavy stoneware in primary colors is always a great "outside" choice. We've also seen several patterns featuring food at recent housewares shows; these would be perfect for people who like to grill.

There are so many options and patterns, we couldn't possibly cover them in one article, but we did want to give you a starting place with manufacturers. So, here is what I've found: *Tableware Today* magazine recently celebrated its 10th anniversary and shared its 10 favorite lines. Here they are.

- Cherry by Gien
- Colorways by Lindt Stymeist
- Elizabeth Hydrangea by Droll

#### Designs

• Jaguar Jungle by Lynn Chase Designs

- Medusa by Rosenthal
- Pop by Noritake
- Queen Victoria by Herend
- Taylor by MacKenzie-Childs
- Villa Della Luna by Pfaltzgraff
- Vivo by Vietri

## DISPLAY

Do you have to designate a certain amount of space for your tabletop product? No, it depends on how much you want to invest in the category. If you want to be a desti-

the complementing bells and whistles (bowls, plates, glasses, etc.). Another area where you can display tabletop is in your book or magazine area; a small table with a couple chairs can hold a beautiful tea set or a platter set. Customers love to be relaxed, and a display such as this gives customers that feeling.

Of course, the department that makes the most sense is the gourmet food section or near your café if you have one. Tabletop can work as the base of a sale or as an add-on, and don't forget about the linens for the tabletop...but that's in next month's "Developing Markets."

## COMPETITION

After reading some of the articles for tabletop retailers, it seems they have the same complaint as garden centers: Independent specialty tabletop retailers have been attacked by big box stores offering lower prices or a larger selection. The upside to this problem is that you know how to combat it — by offering high-quality specialty product and great customer service.

Incorporating tabletop into the store may be successful for some, while a mistake for others. Many of the topics mentioned above need to be well thought out before making the big jump. Catherine Evans said in last month's article on gourmet foods, "who doesn't love to eat?" I'll respond by saying, "sure I love to eat, but I need utensils, a plate, a glass..."

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## What made you decide to add tabletop?

We were kind of tired of what we already had, and when you see all that's out there, you think to yourself, "wouldn't it be cool to have some of those new looks ourselves?"

## How much space do you devote to the category?

Well, we do have a kitchen shop. We don't have a tabletop "section" per say; we don't have walls of tabletop; we try to integrate tabletop into other displays so we have a complete look. For example, right now we are doing a beach theme (find more on this trend on page 7); we've got some beach tabletop within the display with a lamp and this and that; it's all together because we're trying to present a look.

## What kinds of products do you sell?

We sell salad plates, plates, mugs, pitchers, bowls, platters — pretty much everything that's available.

## What is your philosophy in choosing products?

Price is important, and it has to look good; it has to be something we like, in regards to design, color and quality. It has to match several different criteria to be something we think our customers will be interested in.

## What products sell best?

Pitchers sell really well; customers might use those for decorating — putting silk flowers in the pitcher — or for serving, but people definitely like to set pitchers around to decorate. Serving pieces sell well, especially decorative serving pieces that someone could use for decorating or serving. Pieces from Vietri sell really well.

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