

"Consumer Talk" appears in each issue of Lawn & Garden Retailer to examine the issues facing today's garden center customers. Our panel of consumers will provide you with insight into their gardening and retail experiences to help you better understand today's customers' needs.

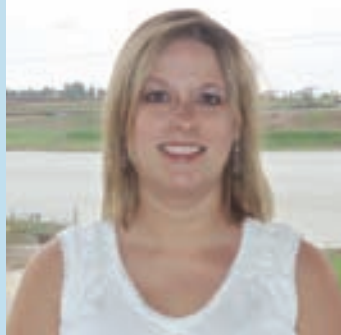
Unique Additions

Gardens are no longer just plants and landscaping. This month, our panelists shared how they accessorize their outdoor spaces.

Jen, 30 Glenwood, Iowa

We continue to work on establishing areas of our yard for flower gardens and plant edging. I'd really like to accessorize the area in our front yard with some stepping stones, or possibly a stone bench. In the back yard, I would enjoy a water feature that provides a calming sound and a peaceful atmosphere. Our neighborhood has seen a lot of visually appealing "gazing balls" in front-yard rock gardens. I have also considered a lattice piece with a climbing plant in the side yard.

It will be nice once our yard is 100 percent landscaped, as it seems to take much longer to get a yard from a dirt lot to a perfectly landscaped yard.



Linda, 50 Bluffton, S.C.

To capture the charm of the South, we recently added a fountain to the center of the courtyard. It is large enough to see and hear from the street, so it welcomes our friends and neighbors walking by. The fountain is surrounded by a garden that is just starting to come to life. I also have three round concrete balls with a mossy filigree pattern that are placed around the plants. I think they add whimsy and a different kind of texture to the garden.

In the backyard, we put a smaller birdbath/fountain in a new planting bed. It is solar powered, so it runs on its own power when the sun is shining on it. It offers a beautiful trickling sound, and the birds love to drink from it. So far, I have not seen any birds bathing in it. The birdbath is framed by four boxwoods and three African irises. I will also add some annuals soon, but I haven't decided which type yet.



Jeanette, 53 Berwyn, Ill.

I love accessorizing my garden. I have tried to keep to a central theme: garden fairies. I have fairies throughout the garden, as statues, stepping stones, small butterfly baths, a bird bath and wind catchers. They add a whimsical and colorful touch to dark corners, under leaves and around my veggies and herbs.

I have added a child-size bench and bistro set next to the house along with stepping stones made from imprints of giant leaves. There is also a large tub in my yard that is a fairy garden. I shop for miniature plants — the Stepables are perfect — to match the scale of the fairyland. I then add decorations and furniture and Cicely Mary Barker fairies to finish the scene. By personalizing my yard, it has become my own space. While I might have the same plants and veggies that are in every other yard, it feels unique. Shopping for garden accessories is as much fun as shopping for plants, sometimes even more so, because I can look for accessories all year!



Questions to Consider

- Does your garden center merchandise vignettes to give customers ideas on decorating their gardens and backyards?
- Do you group decorative products together with plants to encourage add-on sales?
- How do you track customers' interests for repeat sales in the future?
- Got a question for our panel? Send it to lgrconsumers@sgcmail.com