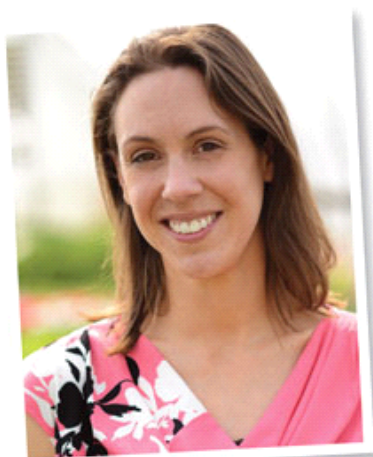


Columns

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All I Want for Christmas

Jennifer Polanz



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Is another hummingbird feeder. Seriously. We had so much fun this summer watching the hummingbirds feed on the porch in front of our house that I'd like another. The kids even named them: Gracie, Cuddles and Fruit Snack (there were actually only two, I think, but whatever, they loved it).

I do have a point here—people who love gardening love to get gardening gifts. And it doesn't have to be "hard-core gardeners" who love to get plant-related gifts. It can be a younger new homeowner who's trying out patio container gardening for the first time. Or the person who lives in an urban apartment who needs a little green to light up their life.

Plants and garden products make great gifts, even the hardgoods. The products are already in the store, but you're going to have to help your customers see the gift potential in them. First, a "basket" to fill—you could use anything from a garden hod to a plant container to an actual basket (or even one of those pop-up grow bags). Use your imagination here.

Now, you can make themed gifts or general gardening gifts. A theme could be bird-related (those bird feeders with some food and a bird identification book) or even a newbie gardener theme (a hose and nozzle, gardening gloves, colorful hand tools, a copy of "Garden-pedia: An A to Z Guide to Gardening Terms" and a gift card to the garden center).

The point is gifts are only limited to your imagination. Of course, things like chalkboard paint and burlap are totally in, so make sure your gift combinations have a touch of Pinterest to pique the interest of your buyer. Another option is to create gift combination ideas and send them out in a "wish list" format so customers can think about creating their own custom gifts. You could list what you have for a "basket" and the items they could put inside.

Here's the deal: the holidays are crazy busy. Customers are looking for meaningful gifts, but are short on time when it comes to picking it out and putting it together. The more the retailer does to help the process, the better off everyone is come holiday time.

And let's not just think about those hardgoods as gifts. Live potted plants are still a beautiful way to express how much you care about someone. Often garden centers give those gift options up to other stores like grocery stores, florists and big box stores. Let's take it back. You'll find some strategies for boosting gift sales through potted plants.

Locally crafted gifts are also all the rage and Amanda Thomsen extols the benefits of working with local artisans to provide garden-related gifts with meaning.

And finally, if you'd really like to make a difference for the holidays, give Hortica Insurance's Zachery Bruce his Christmas wish of fewer accidents in the garden center this year. He provides pointers for a safer retail environment for customers and employees.

Here's wishing you a safe, happy and profitable holiday season. **GP**