

Features

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The Art of Sound in the Garden

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Fountains and water features have long been a staple at garden retailers. Has anything changed? Are there shifts in the category that you should know about? I set out to find what's trending in this category, as well as get advice from producers on how to best position these at retail. Here's what I found out.

The 3-Bowl Zen Fountain from Henri Studio is an organic design with large pools of water and copper spills for a laminar flow.

When it comes to trends, like all trends, it depends on where you're at. Frank Honold, owner and president of Henri Studio, told me it really depends on the local demographics and geography.

"Is it urban, suburban or rural with wide open spaces?" he asked. Naturally wide open spaces will translate to bigger fountains, while urban may be smaller and more modern. "Those two questions will guide the size and style, and maybe even the sound level decision." Makes sense, right?

He noted they've shifted more toward patio fountains that have contemporary designs with their newer offerings (but, again, consumer preference will depend on location and demographics). Price ranges anywhere between \$750 and \$2,000 seem to be the sweet spot for consumers.

"We believe the consumer is recognizing quality and longevity of material versus just price," he said. "Consumers seem to be truly focused on buying American when they can. They really want to enjoy the sight and sound of flowing water in their gardens and enjoy the wildlife that comes to the water as well—especially birds!"

If consumers begin shifting more toward American-made products, the Henri Studio lineup is well-positioned for that, as Frank noted their products are made OF the USA, with Indiana limestone, Illinois sand and cement, and Lake Michigan water.

Another interesting tidbit Frank told me is the difference the copper spills can make on fountains. They've incorporated them into many of their newer designs and they allow a smooth, laminar flow. He added larger pools of water are trending, both for the visual effect of reflection and to lengthen the amount of time in between refilling the fountain.

Plug & Play

At Border Concepts, they also know consumers want to hear the sound of water while relaxing in their garden and patio spaces. They've found tiered fountains where water cascades from one tier to the next appeal to consumers, said Kevin Lundy, senior product manager for Border Concepts.

"Customers also like 'Plug & Play' fountains that require little setup out of the box," he added. "Just fill with water, attach the pump and plug into an outlet."



To that end, the small-sized fountains sell well from within their catalog—the ones that can be placed on a tabletop or take up a small footprint within the garden. They offer a wide range of glazed ceramic fountains that come in a variety of colors, which complement a broader range of cement cast fountains.

The Verona Fountain from Henri Studio is a contemporary design that features multi-tier pools of water and copper spills for a laminar flow.

Retail Best Practices

The general advice is to have the fountains running while displayed in the garden center. That can be a challenge, but in the end it's worth it.

"This is critical to retailers' success," Kevin said. "Keep the fountains clean. Border Concepts recommends having a display of running fountains with backup inventory on hand for customers to purchase. 'One for show and one to go.'"

When it comes to displaying them, Frank recommended having fountains grouped together to allow customers to comparison shop and decide which they prefer. However, we talked about ways to avoid the appearance of a fountain graveyard (my words, not his). He recommended interspersing plant material in. And, of course, have them running.



"The best I've seen combine these two elements by displaying fountains together, but then also bringing some plant material in amongst that display to give the consumer a better visualization of how their landscape might look," he said. "Taking one or two fountains and placing them in other parts of the store highlights the fact that you do carry fountains to the wandering customer."

The Strawberry Jar Fountain from Border Concepts comes with the pump and is available in the blue-green color shown here.

Add-on and complementary products help customers with their overall success and provide additional revenue streams. These products can include replacement pumps, fountain tubing and hose clamps, as well as algaecide for keeping the fountain water clean, Kevin said.



Frank added fountain covers are a natural addition to the sale to keep debris out of drain holes and prevent frozen water expansion when not in use.

The Frog on Lily Pad Fountain from Border Concepts is a glazed ceramic option that comes with the pump and is available in green and blue.

Above and Beyond

Fountains can be one of those product lines where some customers may want to DIY it, but others want the white glove service. Frank recommended offering installation services (which, as a bonus, ensures it's set up properly), as well as annual fall draining and spring start-up. This service can be sold as an annual contract similar to irrigation maintenance.

Kevin noted retailers could offer repair services, as well, and they could offer to make pottery pieces into fountains, which are great for small-space gardens and patios.

"This takes some knowledge and experience, but retailers that offer this service find it to be a nice source of additional revenue," he added.

And, finally, Frank gave me a couple of key bullet points to impart on customers via education to blunt the learning curve of first-time fountain owners:

- Top off with water when it's low (either from evaporation, or splash or wind gusts)
- Skim debris off the surface of the water
- Be sure to pull the drain plugs to empty the fountain at the end of the season before an overnight freeze

Offering these services and advice can go a long way to helping customers stay successful and happy with their fountain purchases. **GP**