

Cover Story

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Year-Round Houseplant Sales

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We've done it for decades: Sold down the houseplant department in spring and beefed it back up in the fall. After all, you're selling real garden plants—and a ton of them—once the outdoor gardening season begins.

But what would happen if we flipped the narrative? That is, what would holding inventory steady or even increasing houseplant inventory do for you? Two retailers with experience in this category shared their tips for stoking and supplying the demand through all 12 months.

Jerry Schmitt's Tips Stein's Garden & Home, Milwaukee,

Wisconsin

Look at the numbers:

- Don't assume customers are too busy shopping the bedding plant and nursery departments in spring.
- Some of Stein's largest growth in the indoor plant department has been in the second quarter, when they have the most foot traffic.
- Keeping the houseplant department fully stocked year-round but especially in the second quarter is key in growing the category overall.

Pictured: Keep the houseplant department looking its best by not hesitating to move tired-looking plants to an incremental markdown location.

Regularly restock plant material rather than dedicate more space to the program to:

- Keep displays fresher.
- Have quicker turns.
- Reduce shrink that comes with plants being on the bench longer than they should.

Building a strong vendor network:

- Allows for more frequent restocking.

- Helps you maintain a more even inventory.

Keep the department looking its best:

- When any plant looks a little tired, don't hesitate to move it to an "As Is" section with incremental markdowns.
- This preserves margin dollars as opposed to tossing plants when they're dead.
- Saves the labor cost of caring for less-than-prime materials.
- There's always a customer looking for a plant that needs a little TLC.

Presentation is key!

- Mix up the product, programs and placement, as well as the look of the display. This is especially true for the gift plant department, which includes the typical seasonal changeouts, too.
- It's the first thing customers see when they walk in Stein's doors, so they focus on keeping it fresh and inviting at all times.



Change up the packaging:

- Changing up the pots and packaging your tropicals come in encourages regular customers to come back to see what's new.
- Some vendors are switching out of traditional grower pots to offer something different.
- Try different vendors on occasion to keep your selection interesting for both plants and packaging.

Pictured: Changing up pots and packaging is a good way to get regular customers back in the store, especially in the gift plant category.



Will Heeman's How-Tos Heeman Greenhouses & Strawberry Farm, Thorndale, Ontario

Catch the two-times-a-year garden center customer.

- Stock the most inventory when the most people are in the stores—April-June and then Christmas.
- Grow your basket even more during those times; e.g. annuals and houseplants.
- Heeman's brings in one truck of foliage from Florida per week May-June.

Create bench displays around themes.

- Displays are useful for showcasing information on topics, e.g. Pet-Friendly Plants.
- Provide handouts! Even Millennials and younger folks prefer the ease of picking up information quickly.
- Include information that covers customers' three main requests: low light, low maintenance, air filtering houseplants.

Pictured: Stock the most inventory when you have the most people in the stores, typically mid-spring and year-end

holidays.

Emphasize plants' benefits, not features.

- Indicate a plant is air filtering or safe for pets rather than promoting dark-green foliage or fast-growing.

Have the sales during the slowest overall sales time.

- For Heeman's, that would be January and February.
- Even so, this January's houseplant sales were up 300% over last year's sales.

Indoor Outfitters

Besides philodendrons, tillandsias and a change-up in packaging, what else should your houseplant department carry?

- Specialized soils and fertilizers, both conventional and organic.
- Pots—drop-ins, deco, holiday, themed, self-watering.
- Don't forget the saucers!
- Pricing tiers of watering cans.
- Hanging basket options—pots, macramé, holders, wall hooks, etc.
- Combo planters as gift items.
- Snips and trimming tools.
- How-to hand-outs.
- Books—both instructional and coffee-table types. **GP**