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Soaring Sales for Winter

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The cause and effect of the pandemic is still being assessed by garden centers across the country. No one saw this coming, as consumers sought to buy anything that would enhance the home experience while quarantined. Gardening aside, there was tremendous sales growth in outdoor patios, grills, pools, hot tubs, solar lighting, decorative pots, firepits and even backyard games. These departments were totally sold out in many regions. Oh... and I almost forgot another sellout—bird seed. Are you kidding me?

Demand Up, Supply Down

Supply could be the tip of the iceberg. Winter is coming and activities will slowly revolve back indoors. New participants will continue to restock their feeders, but are we ready for the new business that will surely arrive? Birding is a logical winner and beneficiary of home entertainment for all ages. Are you planning to sell more? Have you sold these products in the past with obstacles or difficulty and eliminated them from your offerings? Is it time for you to reconsider a makeover for this fast-paced department for your store?

Keys to Success—Fuel for Birds

Establishing an area of the store dedicated to wild birds can be as little as a 4-ft. end cap to as large and complete as a store. First, the foundation of a solid department is very good bird food. Most foods that the box stores and discounters sell are a cheap seed blend at a cheap price. They use a lot of fillers. There are unique premium seed choices like Coles Wild Bird Food and Wild Delight that offer packaging that allows the consumer to see the quality inside.

New bird seed products resist squirrels by use of hot pepper additives, which birds don't mind, but warm-blooded animals hate. You don't need a huge variety of choices, but they should include the common types like thistle (or Nyjer seed), black oil sunflower seed and a blended mix with plenty of sunflower seeds. If you add one specialty food, choose from a squirrel-resistant one or a mixture without seed hulls.

Another favorite among birds are suet cakes. Heath Outdoor Products makes a premium suet lineup crafted from natural ingredients, no artificial flavoring, and real fruit and nuts, along with 100% USDA food grade tallow. The

packaging is also important so that the suet doesn't leak and damage the label.

Hummingbird nectars are sold either in powder form or ready to use. Companies like Classic Brands and Perky Pet have long been suppliers of high-quality nectars.

Choosing Your Feeders

This doesn't have to be as complicated as it may seem. Sure, there are hundreds of feeders out there to choose from, but just keep it simple. Pick your assortment based upon the various types of feeders along with price points that make the most sense.

Did you know that certain feeders are constructed to feed specific bird species? Some tube feeders are designed to have a shorter perch to allow smaller finch and songbirds to feed on the feeder. The seed ports may have different spacing or port size, which can determine the type of food used. Wood, metal, glass and plastic are typical materials used. One important key is to make sure you have access to clean the feeder regularly according to the experts.

Merchandising for Success

Store displays can also help guide your customer to make their purchases. Today, it's recommended to offer sections devoted to specific birds that you're trying to attract in the yard. These sections can contain both the feeder and food recommendations for easy pairing by the customer. If you have additional space, you can display categories by the manufacturer to show a dominant assortment. Droll Yankees, now acquired by Classic Brands, developed a complete "feathered" shop and listed these category specialists in their dealer locator section of their web site.

If you're not having success with bird food in your store due to "critters," consider offering segments of birding like bird baths, hummingbird feeders and food, and metal hooks. The consumer will notice the extra choices and dominance of your displays. The sales growth of the birding category once again will soar. **GP**

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