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PLAYING OUTSIDE

New garden and outdoor products make your sales outlook sunny.

by Barbara Wujcik

I live in Chicago where for the past few years there have been two signs that the warmer weather has arrived — the emergence of tulips and the restaurant outdoor dining areas that seem to spring up all over town. It doesn't matter how small the space is, or even whether it is next to a street crowded with traffic, people flock to them. Once it's warm, most people want to be outside.

It appears to be the same throughout the country. Whether gardening, entertaining or just relaxing, more and more people are making use of their outdoor spaces. These spaces may include a garden, patio and/or deck. More and more people are gardening. For some, gardening is relaxing. It can be creative and you can also see the results of your efforts. Gardens can also be a place of tranquility, a place that offers a peaceful escape from the world.

The concept of the garden, patio and/or deck as another room also continues to grow. The spaces are looked at as another place to decorate, show personal style, even make an oasis from the world.

These are reasons why gardening and outdoor products should be part of your retail mix. Your customers and potential customers are looking for ways to add visual appeal and enjoy their outdoor surroundings. This year there are a variety of products that will be appreciated gifts and choices to create great outdoor spaces.

GARDEN IS GROWING

"Garden products are probably very popular because people consider this part of their home décor," says Laura Bales, product develop-

ment coordinator at Roman Inc. (www.retailers.roman.com).

"The popularity of garden items is probably also on the rise due to the increasing popularity of people creating larger gardens for their homes. With the boom in the eco-friendly and green trends, homeowners want to do their part by planting and maintaining their space and a nice large garden. This means they need garden décor and out-



This funky floral print giant kneeler from Dorothy Biddle Service (570/226-3239 or www.dorothybiddle.com) measures 17.25" x 24" and is 1.25" thick. With so much surface, you can move around on it instead of moving it around. Made of vinyl, clean up is easy. Suggested retail: \$37.95.

door products to keep their yards and homes looking modern and stylish."

Lynne Dodson, owner of Dorothy Biddle Service, agrees about the popularity of gardening and sees the influence of "star power" as a factor.

"We are also still seeing the results of Martha Stewart's interest in flower gardening and bringing the flowers into the home — flower arranging hadn't been popular for several decades. Ms. Stewart renewed interest among a younger crowd, so now we're seeing more cutting gardens going in. There's even a new company in Virginia (Gardener's Workshop) that promotes flower gardening and the interest in cutting gardens."

NEW SHOOTS COMING UP

Clint Albin is media relations manager for the Independent Garden Center Show, which will be held August 17-19, at Chicago's Navy Pier. The show is a source of a variety of garden and garden-themed gifts. In addition, the show includes educational seminars and special events. For information, visit www.igcshow.com.

Speaking of star power, Clint says

vegetable gardening has an important advocate.

"One of the things currently happening is first lady Michelle Obama's interest in educating kids about how their food choices affect their health and future. She has planted a vegetable garden at the White House as part of this effort. We expect to see gardening for other reasons than the love of gardening. However food gardening can be the gateway to doing ornamental gardening."

Lynne from Dorothy Biddle also sees a trend to vegetable gardening.

"Certainly vegetable gardening is coming back 'in.' Back in the '70s it was very popular (Victory Gardens, etc.) during the recession, and now not only are people growing their own vegetables as a way to save money, but they are also thinking in terms of 'local foods.' I know here in the Delaware River Highlands, there is a lot of interest in buying locally grown foods."

"Why buy tomatoes that have been trucked here from California or Florida when you can grow your own or at least buy them from a local farmer's market. I also think that many people are finding gardening to be very satisfying — it just feels good to look at your garden and see things you've planted growing and making your place more beautiful."

And Clint says food is influencing other areas of products and that offers other opportunities for retailers.

"We are seeing more

Decorative and functional metal birdhouses from Regal Art & Gift (800/681-3040 or www.regalartgift.com) have vents under the roof for ventilation, hinged doors for easy cleaning and small holes in the bottom for drainage. Available in four styles. Suggested retail: \$22.50.

interest in food images. This can be an opportunity for gift retailers as we see antique seed memorabilia and images on cards. For years, botanical themes have been prominent, now there is a move toward food themes in giftware and home goods. Animal husbandry is also another growing interest. We have seen lots of chicken and rabbit motifs on tableware as well as garden and outdoor products."

A PLACE OF THEIR OWN

"We certainly feel more consumers are people opting to spend their free time



BreezeArt premium decorative flags are made with SolarSilk polyester, a Magnet Works (800/886-3121 or www.magnet-works.com) exclusive. They are 40-percent heavier than most, yet they have a softer, silkier feel for better drape and movement in the breeze. Suggested retail: \$10.50.

at home in lieu of vacationing somewhere," says Tammy Hickel, vice president of sales and marketing at Magnet Works Ltd.

"As a result, they are focused on more open-air living areas and are looking for decorative items that help to create an enjoyable environment in which to spend time. A decorative flag placed within the garden or in a pot of flowers adds personality to the area, creating a big impact with a minimal investment."

"Important trends we see are designs that pay tribute to the lively and vibrant colors of nature. Butterflies in particular are key as a design element. Patriotic influences are strong and we see the monogram trend continuing."

Outdoor spaces can serve many purposes. Laura from Roman explains.

"People are finding increasing solace in their 'green spaces' regardless of space. That, and the increased popularity of inspirational garden items, have our introductions positioned in perfect timing with the market. Solar and fiber-optic-enhanced garden accessories are also very much in trend, extending



Simply stated against a blue-green world, the Save the Planet mat from Imports Unlimited (609/704-9900 or www.wholesaledoordecor.com) is made from 100 percent hand-woven all-natural coir fiber and decorated in richly colored fade resistant dyes. Suggested retail: \$19.99.



"The romance of a thousand years..." bench by Kay Berry Inc. (800/426-1932 or www.kayberry.com) is an unique addition to any outdoor living space. Made of quality American-made cast stone, it is backed with a lifetime guarantee. The bench is 29" x 12" x 14.5" and weighs about 54 pounds. Suggested retail: \$160.

PLAYING OUTSIDE

daytime garden enjoyment into the evening. Solar-powered also is green since it reduces waste. More natural materials such as stone are being used."

INDOORS AND OUTDOORS

The look and style of outdoor products continue to evolve.

"The popularity of garden and outdoor products has been steadily increasing over the past few years as the concept of nesting takes hold," says Maria Hill, executive director of Outdoor/Indoor. The Garden at AmericasMart in Atlanta.

"Right now, people are still inter-

ested in maintaining their homes and the demand to have success in doing so continues to strengthen. They are also entertaining more at home and seek a unique outdoor setting for time spent at home outdoors.

"Bringing inside living outside and vice versa, outdoor products are con-



These insect-themed stake votive holders from **Abbott** (800/263-2955 or www.abbottcollection.com) are available in four styles. Made of cast iron, they are 17" high. Suggested retail: \$15.

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sistently being used for indoor environments, bringing the outdoors in. And, outdoor living and entertaining products are looking and feeling more and more like they can also be used indoors."

Alex Kalafatides from Imports Unlimited would agree.

"At Imports Unlimited we are striving to make doormats a more interesting category by transforming the category from a merely utilitarian one to a category that offers an element of home décor."

"We see doormats becoming more popular as they are allowing people to express themselves. Some of the trends we see are environmental and retro. We see that people are more willing to have something more colorful on their doorstep."

BRINGING IT OUTDOORS

Lynne of Dorothy Biddle Services sees opportunities for many types of retailers.

"Book shops can set up a section of garden books with a few tools and gardening gloves; Gift Shops can find garden tools and accessories that are different, and 'higher-end' than what is found at the big box stores — their customers will be happy to find these quality items."

Maria suggests, "Use a lifestyle approach when you display your garden products. Create color stories, group eco-friendly items together and use outdoor products in indoor settings to show their versatility." ☛



The brushed-steel and copper wrap-around design cups are the latest in the **Tervis Tumbler** (866/886-2537 or www.tervis.com) collection. Tumblers keep hot drinks hot and cold drinks cold, and are microwave and dishwasher safe. Each comes with a black travel lid. Suggested retail: \$15 each.