

Photo by Jeanne Davant



# Businesses sow seeds for high season in winter

Good Earth Garden Center Manager Robin Boutilier arranges a display of pumpkins, a big fall seller along with pottery and other holiday decorations.

By Jeanne Davant

**L**ike the plants it sells, Good Earth Garden Center appears to be dormant in the winter.

But behind the scenes, Good Earth's general manager Robin Boutilier is nurturing the business and preparing it to blossom again in the spring.

Many seasonal businesses like Good Earth experienced strong summer sales as people stayed at home and sought to enhance their nests.

Now they're finding new ways to boost business during the slower seasons and planning ahead for next year.

"There's a lot to do in the winter," Boutilier said.

Much of Good Earth's merchandise is ordered six to nine months in advance. Boutilier said she was already working on a shrubbery order for next year from her wholesale purveyor.

"Most of our pottery comes from across the pond," she said. "We get pottery from Vietnam, China, Italy and Germany." The orders she's placing now will start coming in next month and continue through March.

While she didn't know specific numbers, Boutilier said Good Earth did well this summer.

"We've been up steadily" over last year, she said.

Fountains and pottery were particularly popular this summer.

"A lot of people liked what they saw," Boutilier said. "They may not have been spending some of their discretionary income at restaurants or traveling."

That benefited plant sales as well.

One customer whose family usually takes multiple trips each year decided instead to redo the landscape in front of their house and purchased a large installation of perennials.

Even though Boutilier ordered seeds and plants aggressively last year, "there were shortages and things that we couldn't necessarily get until the seed companies caught up," she said. "So there were a few hiccups in the supply chain, and that continues on occasion with some items."

During the fall season, Good Earth sells items like garlic for planting now and harvesting next summer, as well as plants like chrysanthemums that provide bursts of color to fall landscapes.

Holiday decorations are another big fall sales category.

"We carry Old World Christmas ornaments, Christmas trees, wreaths, roping, greens and decorative items like potted amaryllis," Boutilier said.

The garden center also stocks gift items.

"Garden art is still really popular because people want to pick up gifts," she said.

Boutilier enjoys the slower pace of her work during the cooler months.

"I spend a couple of hours here, and I like to go for a stroll," she said.

The business will close Dec. 23 for three weeks, but Boutilier will go in to pick up mail and receive orders. "We really hit the ground in January," she said.

"People will want to lay in germination mix, and we will give advice and tell them how to grow. January through March tends to be a lot of talking, unpacking, staging garden art, answering the phone and answering questions. If I can sell seedling trays, I will do that."

Her focus shifts about every eight weeks, Boutilier said, until the next high season hits around April 15.

## YEAR-ROUND LANDSCAPING

Timberline Landscaping's biggest struggle this summer was finding enough people to handle the increase in demand for residential work. The shortage has continued this fall, and the company is still looking to hire.

"We have had a plethora of work, with more people at home recognizing improvements they wanted to make," said Stephanie Early, Timberline's chief of strategy.

Timberline's main focus, though, is commercial customers.

"We're about 65 to 70 percent commercial," she said. "From there it breaks down between construction and landscape maintenance."

The company also does tree care, a service that was added about two years ago. Snow removal is a big part of its business in the winter.

"We're one of the larger snow removal providers in town," Early said. "That's something that's been

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## BACK TO SCHOOL

Economic downturns have been a boon for higher-ed institutions. Is now any different?



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