

Purely Reliable

Tried-and-true natural plant food products from The Espoma Company will keep customers coming back for more.

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The organic movement may be big news now, but products from The Espoma Company have paved the way in gardening, even predating the garden center industry.

"We began selling our first product, Espoma Organic, in 1929, primarily to nurseries and caretakers of estates," says Jim Kaminskas, vice president of sales for The Espoma Company. "After World War II, suburban neighborhoods were created and garden centers evolved. We were there from the start."

Espoma's No. 1 product, Holly-tone, had already been created and positioned as the

"In the past, we had to downplay the organic nature

of our products because many retailers had a negative experience with products that didn't work and didn't sell," he says. "Today, we can emphasize the organic nature of our plant foods as a benefit."

"The rise in organic food has been due to consumer demand for safe products that taste as good as or better than traditional foods," he adds. "With gardening, consumers want safe products that are as effective as or better than traditional products."

One of the biggest trends in gardening, Kaminskas says, is that today's gardener, with her busy lifestyle, needs products that do what they say they'll do, while also



says. In addition, Espoma advertises with several garden radio programs and regional consumer gardening magazines.

But the small family business's limited marketing budget doesn't stop Espoma from providing superior service to garden centers, Kaminskas adds. "Espoma employs a staff of experienced, regional managers that train and educate garden centers on everything from product knowledge to sales and merchandising techniques," he says. "Espoma offers a generous cooperative advertising program, as well as a wide range of point-of-sale materials including banners, signs, displays and pocket guides."

In addition, Espoma's Web site is a key tool in promoting not only products but also gardening know-how on all levels of the supply chain.

The company's state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Millville, N.J., also sets Espoma apart, Kaminskas says.

"It provides consumers with consistent and reliable product quality across the country; it provides distributors and retailers with fast turnaround time, flexible scheduling and 100 percent on-time deliveries," he says. "It also helps ensure that we are the low-cost provider in the natural organics category." TGC

Sharpen Your Edge

Here are five things Jim Kaminskas of The Espoma Company would like to see independent garden centers focus on:

1. Make sure all associates are properly trained. Use your key vendors as resources.
2. Cross-merchandise hard goods with green goods.
3. Provide display gardens to inspire the consumer.
4. Display better signage and POP materials, i.e. checklists and care sheets.
5. Reinvest in your store and property. Don't let your store get old!

leading food for hollies, azaleas, rhododendrons and other acid-loving plants, and the company's business took off from there. Other popular products include: Garden-tone, Plant-tone, Rose-tone, Flower-tone, Tree-tone and more.

In the past several years, Espoma has seen steady growth in sales of its products, which Kaminskas says can be attributed not only to the rising interest in organics, but also to the efficacy and reliability of the products and their premium packaging.

appealing to her conscience. Consumers also want simplicity, safety, convenience and results, he says. "The Espoma Tones offer all of these because they are ready-to-use, contain nothing hazardous or toxic and make your garden beautiful."

Building On What Works

Because Espoma's products are so well known, the company has relied upon its main marketing tactic, word-of-mouth from retailers and gardeners, Kaminskas



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