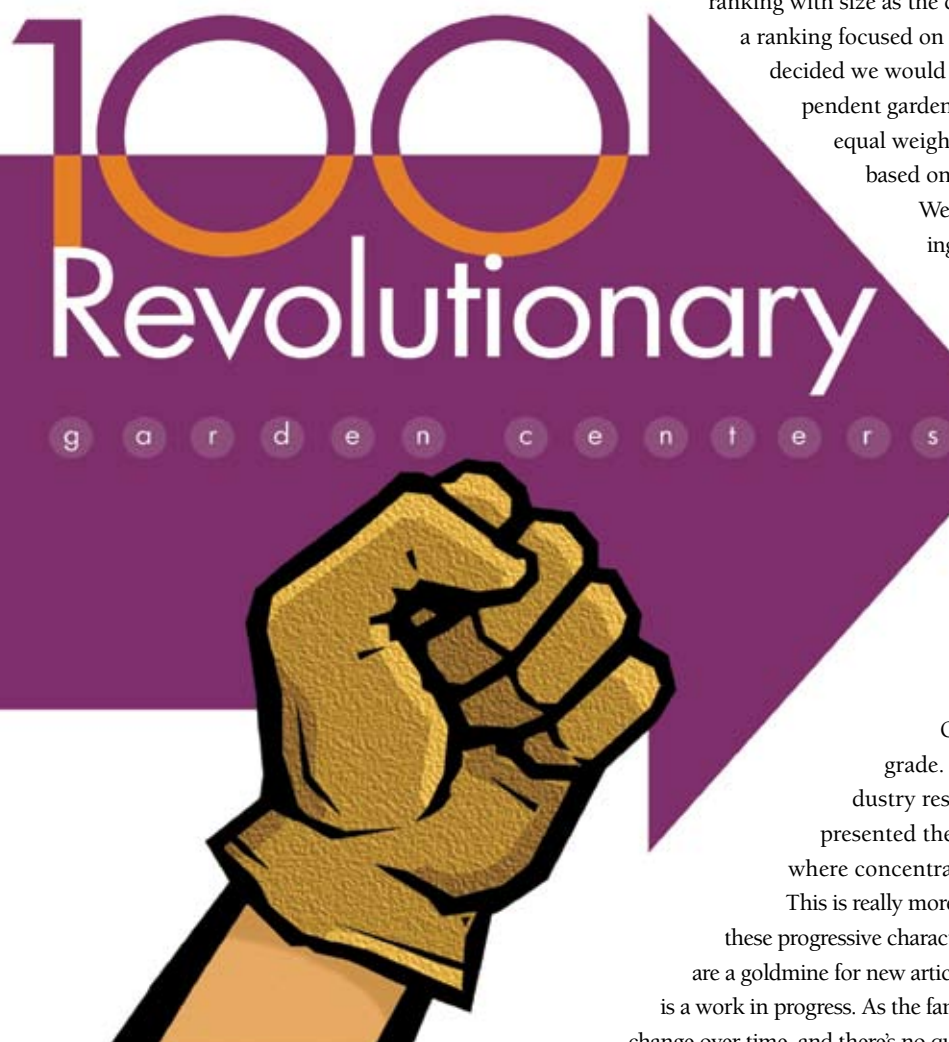


You say you want a revolution?

Well, we've gone out and found the 100 most revolutionary garden centers in the country and are presenting them to you by region.



Ever since we launched *Today's Garden Center* at the end of 2003 with our upward-leading fist and tagline – Leading the Revolution in Garden Retailing – we've been excited by the response from readers who also believe in the revolution, as more garden centers embrace the best of modern retailing.

The challenge has been identifying what makes a garden center revolutionary and who these leaders are. There isn't any one place you can find them.

In our sister magazine, *Greenhouse Grower*, we publish a Top 100 Growers ranking with size as the criteria. In the garden center industry, there is a ranking focused on dollars that also includes big-box retailers. We decided we would create a definitive report focused solely on independent garden centers that would give single-location retailers equal weight with larger independent chains. It would be based on leadership, not size or money.

We worked with industry insiders to identify the ingredients that would make up the most revolutionary garden centers. Then we developed a questionnaire and assigned points to the criteria, with a maximum of 100 points. These questions covered employee training, industry involvement, profitability, marketing, use of technology, purchasing, customer service and community service. We graded on a curve. The highest score was 91 and we established a baseline of at least 50 points to make the list. We see this baseline climbing over time, as our 100 Club continues to raise the bar.

Of the 150 completed surveys, 78 made the grade. We identified the remaining 22 through industry resources and our own visits and coverage. We've presented them alphabetically in each region, reflecting where concentrations of garden centers are.

This is really more of a "100 Club" of garden centers who share these progressive characteristics. The completed questionnaires themselves are a goldmine for new article ideas. Like our industry, this new annual report is a work in progress. As the famous Beatles song says, much of it is *evolution*, or change over time, and there's no question "we all want to change the world." This song is dedicated to all you garden retailers leading the revolution! Sing it!

Northeast *Recommended by Industry Sources

Company Name	City/State	Locations	Years	Revolutionary concept or idea
American Plant Food Co.	Bethesda, MD	2	83	Holds "Earthwise University" training, which is 8 to 10 one-hour-long classes.
Ashcombe Farm & Greenhouses	Mechanicsburg, PA	1	43	Garden makeover promotions drew publicity, excited customers.
Aspatuck Garden	Westhampton Beach, NY	1	30	Sponsors non-gardening community events that customers attend.
Atlantic Nursery & Garden Shop	Freeport, NY	1	75	Extends plant guarantee to 2 years with purchase of Bumper Crop and Roots.
Barlow Flower Farm	Sea Girt, NJ	1	25	T-Shirt Club - Customers wear a Barlow's T-Shirt, get 10 percent off purchases.
Churchill's	Exeter, NH	1	49	Invests in pre-purchasing; buys from some vendors on consignment.

Country Market Nursery	Mechanicsburg, PA	1	60	Partners with non-profits to share costs, benefits and customer lists.
Fairfield Garden Center	Fairfield, NJ	1	38	Participates in half-hour pond building show on local cable station.
Gary's Gardens	Severna Park, MD	1	5	Uses technology to have availabilities on schedule, efficiency in restocking.
Grossman's Country Nursery	Penfield, NY	1	21	Vendors pay cost of advertising on TV/radio; garden center gets more exposure.
*Hick's Nurseries	Westbury, NY	1	153	Has a seminar room for events, cooking demonstrations and meetings.
*Homestead Gardens	Davidsonville, MD	1	36	Employs visual merchandising team for exciting, daring displays.



Barlow Flower Farm

What is your most revolutionary idea when it comes to marketing?

"The Barlow T-Shirt Club," writes Stephen Barlow III. "This is our twist on the frequent buyer clubs cards that are offered at many retailers. We sell a T-shirt to our customers. The shirt generally has a garden design with our name on it (it is different from our staff's uniform). When the customer wears the shirt, they receive 10 percent off their entire purchase."

Laughton Garden Center	Chelmsford, MA	1	71	Held an auction to boost lagging inventory sales.
Matterhorn Nursery Inc.	Spring Valley, NY	1	25	Buys container loads from overseas for volume prices.
*Martin Viette Nurseries	East Norwich, NY	1	76	Has an open-to-buy plan for quicker turns and less static inventory.
Parker Gardens	Scotch Plains, NJ	1	50	Participates in Jersey Grown program to tout homegrown products.
Peconic River Herb Farm	Calverton, NY	1	20	Used advertising budget on expansive display grounds for public use.
Riverside Nursery & Garden Center	Collinsville, CT	1	32	Calls customers personally; conducts in-home consultations; excels in service.
Scenic Nursery & Landscaping	Raymond, NH	1	10	Processes bare root, plugs and liners to grow on to saleable size.
*Sickles Market	Little Silver, NJ	1	98	Buyers in the company constantly study consumer trends.
Sonora's Gardens	Horseheads, NY	1	4	Growing less, buying in to conserve fuel and labor; buying locally.
Stauffers of Kissel Hill	Lititz, PA	6	74	Reduced inventory process to one to two days with handheld scanners.
*Van Wilgen's Garden Center	North Branford, CT	1	86	Redesigned traffic flow for improved efficiency.
*Waterloo Gardens	Exton & Devon, PA	2	64	Has a complete Web site for customer research, including gift ideas for holidays.
Williams Nursery	Westfield, NJ	1	85	Point-of-sale system used for multiple pricing, loyalty program.

Southeast *Recommended by Industry Sources

Company Name	City/State	Locations	Years	Revolutionary concept or idea
Across The Pond, Inc.	Huntsville, AL	1	2 ½	Focuses on excellent employees who provide great customer service.
Boulevard Flowers, Inc.	Colonial Heights, VA	1	50	Touts locally grown "Boulevard Fern" with custom print tags for premium price.
Countryside Gardens	Hampton, VA	1	3 ½	Hosts four "Red Hat" parties a year and carries a large selection of Red Hat merchandise.
DeWayne's Home & Garden Showplace	Selma, NC	1	14	New lines such as Vera Bradley and Rainbow Sandals have boosted sales.
Fairview Garden Center	Raleigh, NC	1	30	Uses the facility to host employee appreciation days for corporations.
Greenbrier Nurseries	Roanoke, VA	3	48	With POS it has paperless inventory; creates plant info that prints with receipt.



DeWayne's Home & Garden Showplace

How do you communicate your brand (the store) in your operation?

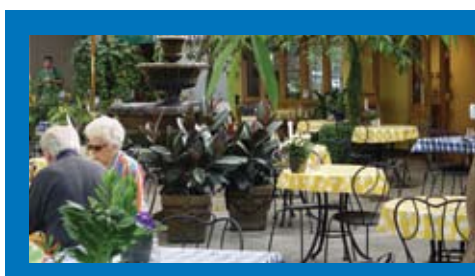
"We try to communicate our brand with a 'blanket coverage' process," says Marcia Woodall. "The logo is used on site to promote the store and make certain shoppers are aware of where they are shopping. Handcarts, exterior signage, shopping baskets, checkout areas, employee uniforms, seasonal displays, informational signage, trash bins, gift cards, shopping bags and gift wrap all display our logo with a consistent design."



Holcomb Garden Center	Hixon, TN	1	40	Sponsors a "brag board" on morning news for flower pictures and related items.
*Homewood Nursery	Raleigh, NC	1	39	Invested in new structure for improved image, greater efficiency.
Johnson Nursery & Garden Center	Cookeville, TN	1	36	Gives a monthly award for landscapes in the city.
L.A. Reynolds Garden Showcase	Winston-Salem, NC	1	25	Wrote mission statement on donations to have a clear focus on philanthropy.
*McDonald Garden Center	Hampton, VA	3	61	Crape Myrtle Festival and associated bonus bucks are loved by customers.
Nobles Greenhouse & Nursery	Live Oak, FL	1	20	Employees wear shirts with logo on front and services and products on back.
Ooltewah Nursery & Landscape	Ooltewah, TN	1	14	Diversified between retail and landscape, includes delivery in retail division.
*Pike Family Nurseries	Norcross, GA	27	48	Extensive training, including Pike University, for all new employees.
Trim-A-Lawn	Pensacola, FL	1	41	Displayed irrigation system inside garden center to show installation and repair.
Wallitsch Garden Center	Louisville, KY	1	60	Customizes sales receipts to help cross-merchandise products.
Woodley's Garden Center	Columbia, SC	1	25	Focuses on fewer vendors to receive volume discounts.
Young's Garden Center	Fort Mill, SC	1	8	Looking at the future to cross cultural and language barriers with customers.

Midwest *Recommended by Industry Sources

Company Name	City/State	Locations	Years	Revolutionary concept or idea
A Proper Garden	Delaware, OH	1	10	Thinks more like Ikea, less like a garden center.
Arnold's Greenhouse, Inc.	LeRoy, KS	1	28	Newsletter promotes "Things To Do In Your Garden Now."
Bachman's Inc.	Minneapolis, MN	7	120	Hosts a Department 56 Village Gathering at the Minneapolis Convention Center that draws 8,000 people and generates \$500,000 in sales.
Berns Garden Center	Middletown, OH	1	50	Sponsor a hospital flower sale that generates dollars to buy medical equipment.
*Bordine Nursery	Rochester Hills, MI	4	66	Web site offers exclusive plant search database.
Chalet Nursery	Willmette, IL	1	88	Promotes lecture series in an Education Center on Web site.
Dayton Nursery	Norton, OH	1	15	Web site has greatly increased customer base, drawing new customers to visit.
Dill's Greenhouse	Groveport, OH	1	21	Bonus bucks have been an outstanding way to draw customers in off seasons.
*English Gardens	Detroit, MI	6	52	Customers can order floral arrangements and lawn and garden products online.
*Earl May Seed & Nursery	Shenandoah, IA	37	86	Operates a 4-acre hardgoods distribution center and 23 acres for live goods.
*Gerten's	Inner Grove Heights, MN	1	100	Buy a pre-loaded plant card in spring, get 10 percent off in-season purchases.
Harvey's Lawn & Garden Center	Carson City, MI	1	28	Active with school fundraising programs and hosts spring and holiday open houses.
Hillerman Nursery & Florist	Washington, MO	1	54	Offers a Garden Reward program.
Hoerr Nursery	Peoria, IL	1	50	Featured in television guest spots and community speaking engagements.
K&W Greenery Inc.	Janesville, WI	1	33	Organizes chartered coach trips to the Chicago Flower & Garden Show three days every March.
Knupper Nursery & Landscape	Palatine, IL	1	73	Sent \$20 coupons to Rotary and Chamber members. Average sale was \$48.72 with 68 percent being new customers



Bachman's

What is your most revolutionary idea when it comes to marketing?

"For 10 years we hosted a Department 56 Village Gathering at the Minneapolis Convention Center that was attended by over 8,000 people each year and generated an average of \$500,000 of additional sales each year," says Paul Bachman. "In 2004, Bachman's opened Patrick's Bakery and Café at our main store. The café serves lunch and killer desserts, and increases our store traffic by hundreds of people each week."

*Otten Bros.	Long Lake, MN	1	52	Showcases new plants and products online as "Fabulous Finds."
*Pasquesi Home & Garden	Barrington, IL	2	30	New, modern garden center will replace the Lake Forest location in March.
Peck's Green Thumb Nursery, Inc.	Cedar Rapids, IA	1	50	Painted all trucks and shopping wagons "Peck's Pink;" carries a pink theme.

Petitti Garden Center	Cleveland, OH	7	35	Radio show is a powerful marketing tool.
Plant Perfect	Bismarck, ND	1	30	Recent remodeling to reinvent themselves as the retail garden center in ND.
Platt Hill Nursery	Bloomington, IL	1	20	Provides tuition reimbursement for employees taking college classes.
*Ray Wiegand's Nursery	Macomb Township, MI	1	45	Effective direct mail to 26,000 loyalty program customers.
Vite Greenhouses, Inc.	Niles, MI	1	20+	Container ideas displays encourage customers to recreate designs.
Wallace's Garden Center & Greenhouse	Davenport, IA	2	25	Beautifies Downtown Davenport with 340 hanging baskets and 190 concrete flower pots.
Wojo's Greenhouse	Ortonville, MI	2	23	Aggressive continued education including industry events, college classes and Dale Carnegie leadership and management program.

Southwest *Recommended by Industry Sources

Company Name	City/State	Locations	Years	Revolutionary concept or idea
*Buchanan's Native Plants	Houston, TX	1	20	Holds butterfly releases at the garden center, then includes photos online.
*Calloway's Nursery	Fort Worth, TX	23	20	Aggressively increasing same-store sales.
Greenhouse Garden Center	Carson City, NV	1	31	Hired a marketing firm to handle marketing.
Harlow Gardens	Tucson, AZ	1	66	Team members are called "Garden Wizards," not sales associates. The help desk is the "Wizard Desk" to remind customers of their expertise.
Natural Gardener	Austin, TX	1	20	Focuses on educating community about organic approach to gardening.
*Nicholson-Hardie Nursery & Garden Center	Dallas, TX	1	107	Slogan "Work Out In The Garden" promotes health benefits.



Ruibal's Plants of Texas, Inc.

Tell us your most innovative idea.

"The Topiary System my dad, Mike, invented," says Mark Ruibal. "It is a wire basket that sits on a pole that you put in a terra cotta (stone, ceramic, etc.) pot. Ten years ago it gave us a product that no one in town (or the country, for that matter) had, and that helped create our image. Since then, we sell them across the country."

North Haven Gardens	Dallas, TX	1	54	Always has something fun going on – photo contest, brag board, herb tea and dessert.
Ruibal's Plants of Texas, Inc.	Dallas, TX	1	22	Hires at least one special-needs student from a local high school each year.
*The Great Outdoors Garden Center & Design Studio	Austin, TX	1	N/A	Posts gardening to-do lists for each month on Web site year-round.
Watters Garden Center	Prescott, AZ	1	43	Host wine-tasting fundraiser for Habitat For Humanity.

West *Recommended by Industry Sources

Company Name	City/State	Locations	Years	Revolutionary concept or idea
Alden Lane Nursery	Livermore, CA	1	50	Hosts a Trends Show in February to get customers ready for the upcoming season.
Almaden Valley Nursery	San Jose, CA	1	30	Employees complete a 40-point New Hire Training Schedule over six months.
Al's Garden Centers & Greenhouses	Woodburn, OR	3	57	Sponsored Lake Oswego's participation in America In Bloom.
Amador Nursery and Design	Sutter Creek, CA	1	27	Customer rewards card program is very successful.
Anderson's La Costa Nursery	Encinitas, CA	1	56	Send direct mail pieces to all new home sales within 11 select local ZIP codes.
Annie's Manhattan Beach Nursery	Manhattan Beach, CA	1	32	Sending floral arrangements to local businesses and doctors offices has been incredibly successful.
Armstrong Garden Centers, Inc.	Glendora, CA	35	117	Training employees on basic hort, salesmanship and plant identification.
Camelot Gardens	Montrose, CO	1	12	Monthly newsletter is published in English and Spanish.



Castle Rock Gift & Garden	Castle Rock, CO	1	10	Works closely with vendors on advertising and promotions.
Cornell Farm	Portland, OR	1	18	Puts the look together by mixing up products into vignettes.
Mission Hills Nursery	San Diego, CA	1	95	Hosts the annual garden walk.
*Molbak's Inc.	Woodinville, WA	1	50	Partners with vendors to allow space for them to merchandise.
Old Towne Nursery	Tehachapi, CA	1	25	Produces a calendar with photos submitted by customers and coupons at the bottom of each page.
Orchard Nursery & Florist, Inc.	Lafayette, CA	1	49	Have exceptional gift shop in an old Spanish home on the property.
Redmond Greenhouse	Redmond, OR	1	55	All events showcase a nonprofit group, generating free advertising.



Almaden Valley Nursery

Training & Staff Development

“Almaden Valley Nursery has developed one of the most extensive employee training programs in the industry,” says Eric Wilder. “Our 40-point New Hire Training Schedule allows our sales staff trainees to achieve the equivalency in horticultural knowledge to our state certification program (which takes 18 months) in just six months. Our ‘What It Takes To Be An Employee At Almaden Valley Nursery’ paper has become famous in the industry and is utilized by many other garden centers.”

Rifle Garden Center	Rifle, CO	1	3	Matches radio spots with planting seasons and design seminars.
Roger's Gardens	Corona del Mar, CA	1	30	Hosts events that appeal to the Top 10 percent of its customers.
Russell's Nursery	Yakima, WA	1	41	Invested in a better facility for events held year-round.
*Swanson's Nursery	Seattle, WA	1	80+	Has an upscale café in a new tropical conservatory building.
Teufel Nursery, Inc.	Portland, OR	1	115	Promotes the next season with attachments to the current sales invoice.
The Plant Centre at the Barn	Olympia, WA	1	19	“If we sell success to our clients, the rest is easy.”