

Media release for the Garden Centre Association

Bird food flies off the shelves during January

MEMBERS of the Garden Centre Association (GCA) saw bird food sales soar during January (2015) according to its Barometer of Trade (BoT) results.

Sales of wild bird food and associated products increased 16% during the month compared with 2014 and the association puts it down, simply, to garden birds needing more food in the colder January than the same month last year.

Will Armitage, Chairman of the GCA, explained: “Throughout the winter months it’s important for people to keep bird feeders topped up.

“Birds require high energy, high fat foods during the cold winter weather to maintain their fat reserves so they can survive frosty nights and our BoT results show that kind-hearted people are certainly willing to help out their feathered friends by providing food for them. Healthy garden birds also help keep pest numbers down in the summer months, so it’s important to look after them.”

Sales of seeds and bulbs also did well in January at 12.5% up.

Alan Goold, Partner at Henry Street Garden Centre in Arborfield, Reading, said: “Overall January sales are up with bird food leading the way due mainly to a drop in prices of the raw materials being passed onto the consumer.

“We also managed to sell through a lot of Christmas goods in a New Year sale, which enabled us to get out some new stock for spring and customers seem to be itching to see the new ranges of furniture coming out which are due to land in February so it does look as though people are more confident for the coming season.”

The BoT results, which are the only official GCA trading figures to be released, also revealed sales of garden sundries at 8.6% up compared to 2014.

Matthew Bent, Chief Executive at Bents Garden & Home in Cheshire, which won a Garden Centre of Excellence award at this year’s GCA conference, said: “January is traditionally a quiet time in the garden centre and retail industry. Christmas is over and it’s still a bit too cold to be out in the garden or getting ready for the season ahead, so it’s important to focus on other product areas to encourage customers to keep visiting.

“Sundries have been good for us, but one of the reasons for our recent expansion is to be able to offer more products and experiences that aren’t seasonally focused. Our food hall, craft shop, cook shop and pet department are all new additions and are already proving beneficial as demonstrated by our January sales figures.”

Creative Gardens, which has centres in Donaghadee, Bushmills and at Galgorm Castle, saw good sales throughout January.

Philip Gass, Finance and Marketing Director at Creative Gardens, said: “January trading was exceptionally good across all centres, like for like our Donaghadee and Bushmills centres saw increases of 23% and 36%, café sales continue to be strong but the significant increases in the garden centres are have arisen from a conscious effort to promote value and take advantage of the post-Christmas sale mentality.

“Traditionally sales in the first week of January have come largely from discounted Christmas goods, this year we expanded the scope of our sale offer significantly and encouraged a greater spend across all departments, even outdoorplants.”

Another garden centre that saw good sales through January was Haskins Ferndown.

General Manager, Matt Hill, said: “Footfall remained strong during January. Our post-Christmas shoppers focused on bird care and garden lighting within sundries and we enjoyed strong sales in clothing and gifts. The restaurant catering team also benefited from the influx coming in from the cold and wet!”

Clothing sales were also up in January by 10.26% compared to 2014.

William Blake, Manager at St Peter’s Garden Centre in Worcester, said: “Our Clothing department has been performing exceptionally well over the past 12 months, with full year sales up 64%. We took the decision to introduce more ‘fashionable’ brands to the department and it has definitely paid off. In addition, we actively purchase ‘star buys’ for women and men for each month, which sell very well. These are normally well recognised leading brands, at promotional prices e.g. up to 50% off.

“A good percentage of our clothing sales come from impulse purchases, and therefore items priced below £20, £30 and £40 work particularly well.

“January 2015 sales were 25% up, although a great deal of this will be clearance and end of season. January clothing sales have also benefitted from the colder weather.”

The GCA BoT reports are compiled using actual sales figures and provide an up-to-date trading position statement. They are made available mid-month following the end of the prior month after all member garden centres have submitted their results.

The reports allow members to compare their trading positions with other centres.

The GCA represents nearly 200 garden centres nationwide.

Through sharing information and its inspection programme, the GCA helps members to achieve high standards in customer service, plant quality and reliability.

For further information, please call 0118 930 8918. Alternatively, please visit www.gca.org.uk, log on to www.facebook.com/pages/GardenCentreAssociation or follow the organisation on Twitter at www.twitter.com/GC_Association.

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Photograph caption one: Will Armitage, Chairman of the GCA.

Photograph caption two: Bents Garden & Home.