



Garden Centers of America: Together We're Better!

GCA's Key Connections: Member Profile

Diane Bulanowski, Sales Area Leader of Perennials, Roses, Trees & Shrubs

Buchanan's Native Plants, Houston, TX

Houston Garden Center Emphasizes Its Focuses on Natives, Organics to Draw Repeat Customers



Nestled among chic boutiques, funky restaurants and character-filled architecture of the historic Houston Heights neighborhood in Houston, TX, Buchanan's Native Plants boasts it is "Houston's largest garden center devoted to Texas native plants and organic gardening," which allows the retailer to secure a loyal customer base.

"Houston has changed a lot, so there are a lot of urban dwellers," says Diane Bulanowski, Sales Area Leader for perennials, roses, trees and shrubs. "This new demographic has smaller areas to garden in, but they still want to garden."

Since these homes are established in the Downtown Houston area and offer only small spaces for gardening, these urban professionals focus on natives and container gardens, according to Bulanowski.

Even the historic homes in the Heights neighborhood are built with small spaces for gardening, making them a key demographic to shop at Buchanan's. "Our most dedicated customers are people who have dwelled in the Heights neighborhood for a long time," she says.



Buchanan's Native Plants appeals to these customers based on their reputation for having a wide selection of drought-tolerant native plants perfect for the sweltering summers and blistery winters in Houston.

"Native plants are a big part of what we offer at Buchanan's," Bulanowski says. "Customers know they can rely on the quality of our plants. We're also well-known for having unusual, hard-to-find plants."



Buchanan's even offers the best in plant care, including organic methods to deal with pests and fungal problems. The store features some organic products made right in Texas. "We really discourage the use of any pesticide that is not organic," she says.

Quality and attention to detail as well as unique native plants displays stood out to Bulanowski as she attended the 2014 GCA Summer Tour to San Francisco with the Buchanan's team. Bulanowski explains that they garnered a lot of information on the store's niche of native plants from networking with other GCA members and visiting the independent garden centers on the tour.

"I liked how the garden centers on the tour marked their native plants with a gold embossed emblem," Bulanowski says. "It really stood out, and I thought that was fantastic."

The garden centers on the tour left a lasting impression with Bulanowski. "I thought each and every garden center we visited had consistent, excellent signage," she says. "We all fell in love with Annie's Annuals & Perennials, which was just a charming place."



Donna Buchanan, Owner-Founder of Buchanan's Native Plants, regularly takes advantage of her GCA membership. "Donna participates in a lot of the GCA events – almost

all of them,” Bulanowski admits. “She does quite a bit of networking throughout the national garden industry, really.”

‘The Roots’ Team Provides Tools for Customers’ Success

Buchanans' reputation for quality plants doesn't come without proper preparation and hard work. Bulanowski is a member of the store's "The Roots" team, which encompasses all of the departments at Buchanan's focused on living materials.

“I think one really important thing is that our staff is very knowledgeable, and we have a lot of people who specialize in different things,” Bulanowski says. Customers who are not well-versed in gardening can be assured that The Roots team at Buchanan's will talk them through the process with helpful gardening tricks, tips and fixes.



“Our information officer creates handouts on the various plants and plant care items we have featured throughout the nursery,” she says. Helpful information is also posted online at Buchanan's website with links to detailed care tips on everything from composting to edibles.

In-store education is also a helpful factor in ensuring customers' gardening success. “We host quite a few classes and workshops, usually in the summer or fall,” she says. Classes and workshops touch on a whole variety of topics, such as children's butterfly gardening, fairy gardening and container gardening.

“The customers know it's not just about buying plants,” Bulanowski says. “They know they can get advice at Buchanan's on planning a garden and planting it.”