

## Business Barometer May 2007

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### Chilly Reception

Water Garden Center in Buhler, Kan.

"With all the rain, things have been kind of slow. April brought extreme amounts of rain and no sun. Now, even though it's raining, it's warmer, and people have started thinking more about their ponds. We had a bad freeze not too long ago. Things are slowly getting green again.

"Pondless waterfalls have been a big seller, and waterfalls with lots of drops and taller falls with multiple streams going into ponds are big. Also, fish have been popular lately."

### Thawing Out

Water Garden Center in Baltimore, Ontario, Canada

"Because of the cold, the ice hasn't been out of the ponds that long. Once the danger of frost has passed, customers get going on the tropicals, water hyacinth and lilies. So far things are slow. I was just scraping ice off the car. Spring is not totally here.

"People are buying fish food and looking to get hyacinths. We decided not to sell them before the last frost, because people would come back and say, 'The plants died, your plants are no good.' Now we do not sell them until the long weekend in May.

"One thing we sell a lot of when the water warms is water hyacinth for keeping the ponds clean. We're big fans of the plant filters. One of the best ones is water hyacinth. Of course they're good for us because the frost kills 'em and we have to sell more of them again next year. We don't sell chemicals or anything, but the hyacinths keep the water clean.

"Of course customers like to buy something else when they get hyacinth, because you can't go into a store and buy just one thing. Basically we sell them fertilizer for the lilies, or there's some new plant that they must have. The [2006 IWGS marginal] plant of the year, *Cyperus papyrus* 'King Tut,' sells well -- it sells on sight.

"A childproof product is the disappearing water feature. I think it is going to catch on. It's a handy kit. Rather than digging a hole and making a space for the rocks, the disappearing fountain kits are sturdy enough that you can walk over the grating. Container gardens, ceramic ponds with a little something in them, sometimes a little bamboo, that sells, too."

### Getting Warmer

Nursery and garden center in Chattanooga, Tenn.

"We're selling a lot of everything. Customers are buying more pondless kits than last year. Definitely seeing an improvement in sales. That's the product that stands out most.

"Generally people are gearing up for the summer. Some new plants are good sellers. New red bog lily (*Crinum* 'Menehune') is popular.

"Our season has been kind of screwy this year. We had a very early spring and a very late freeze. Plant sales are a little behind. After the freeze, they had a lot of damage. That seems to be the case for most of the East. They're just now coming back with the plants; they were looking great, but then they lost foliage."

### Hot for Liner

Nursery and garden center in Albuquerque, N.M.

"Business is booming. New plants are in stock, and there are lots of customers. Liner is a big seller right now. People are building ponds and stocking them with plants.

"We're probably selling quite a bit of it because the ponds have gotten older, need replacing, and people are putting in new ponds. From March to September, it's fairly busy.

"We've gotten a new customer base here. I'm not sure if they are new customers or just putting in ponds.

"We're selling a lot of plants and fish. The regular customers tend to buy filtering grasses, lilies and more fish. We sell a lot of containers and have a lot of art.

"Along with the liner, we sell tons of skimmers, filters and tons of pumps. Pumps have a shelf life of about one to two years, so people are always buying them.

"This is the time of year when people are cleaning out ponds, and we recommend the plants they need. We recommend 70 percent water coverage, and if they don't have that, they come down and pick those up."

Texas-sized Sales  
Pond and fish supply store in Corpus Christi, Texas

"Sales are picking up, and calls are coming in more frequently. People are beginning the Spring Cleaning of their water gardens.

"We see an increase in filtration-system upgrades and departure from in-pond pumps and filters. Because of the intense South Texas sun, UV clarifiers are moving.

"People also want to add decorative touches to their water gardens, with pond lights, garden art, etc. Pondless waterfalls and disappearing fountains are on the rise. We see more of a demand for information and installation on these over last year.

"More people want to incorporate water into their gardens. Most do not want the headache of maintenance, so the trend seems to be for pondless/disappearing features. Either way, pond designers/installers are not slowing down any over here."

Spring Fever Pitch  
Nursery and pond supply store in Jarrettsville, Md.

"It's spring, and it's always crazy. We have long days. Spring runs anywhere from April until the 4th of July. It generally encompasses a 10- to 12-week period; sometimes it comes a little early and sometimes it comes a little later. This year when it hit, oh boy, it hit.

"Winter didn't start until the middle of January, and it was extremely cold into the middle of March. All over the country it was cold. We had a customer in Alabama who had to rent wedding tents to put his annuals in because the temperature was going down to 29. Winter started late, and made a little rebound in April, so it really slowed off the starting gate.

"Usually we fill a lot of orders for the southern part of the country, then it works its way out so that by May there's been a steady feed. This year it went from dead to insane.

"We're selling a lot of everything. It's pretty even across-the-board. April was such a slow start it put our sales to-date at a low rate. It's really hard to gauge until you get to the end of the month. It's just such a high-volume month that it's unrealistic to think that you can judge even halfway through. April sales are down strictly due to the weather.

"Our hard-good sales are up, which is a good sign. Plant sales are down, which stands to reason; the weather drives the plant sales. We sell to such a diverse group that I don't know that any one product is going strong. We've sold a lot of liner this year, filters, skimmers, things like that, but for really big jobs. Private ponds that contractors are putting in. We just had several large orders that are unusual, because the pond sizes are so immense.

"When it's not an exclusive product, then we know it's local, so skimmers and filters, they can get anywhere. The jobs have been particularly large. This week they used 40- by 100-foot liner for the pond. For the other one he used three 6,000gph pumps. So, for Maryland, we're seeing that the installs are bigger."