

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

5/24/2013

Fairly Hot Trend

Chris Beytes

Photography by Chris Beytes

Valerie Landers, 9, her brother, Devin, 12, and their dad, Mike, enjoy a close peek at a fairy garden at Heinz Brothers Greenhouse Garden Center in St. Charles, Illinois. In April, Heinz hosted a Fairy Festival Weekend, drawing several hundred people to view numerous gardens and build their own.



Owner Jay Schrock stocks fairy gardening plants from three suppliers: Bert Hybels in Michigan (Fairy Garden Collection), Batson's Foliage Group in Florida (Ittie Bitties) and Fairy Gardening Inc. (Fairy Flowers). Heinz devotes about 400 sq. ft. to its fairy gardening department.

Fairy Gardening, Inc., founded by Jeff and Emily Sorenson in 2007, is a pioneer in the category, selling fairy gardens at their Colorado garden center since 1999—well before the current craze hit. Jeff credits his employees with pushing him into it.

"I have to admit, I was like a lot of other people who didn't see merit in [fairy gardening]. I was like, 'Oh, man, all right, whatever, guys. If you want to do it, go ahead,'" Jeff recalls. "But it was literally the only product where they'd come into my office 12 months out of the year and say, 'Hey, we have to order more supplies.' I started realizing that we were selling this 12 months out of the year. And in our industry, how often does that come around?"

They began manufacturing a line of fairy gardening furniture and accessories in 2007, and more recently formed a partnership with Henry F. Mitchell Co. and Gulley Greenhouses to sell Fairy Flowers plugs and tags to growers and grower/retailers.

Growth has been “exponential,” Jeff says. “We definitely launched the product at the right time.”

At Batson’s Foliage Group in Mt. Dora, Florida, Kelley Batson Howard says “It’s crazy!” of the demand for fairy garden (and also terrarium) plants that they’ve been growing for three years. Demand is so strong, they had a waiting list for product. “It’s pushing other things we used to do out of the way,” she says. About a quarter of their 2 acres is now dedicated to the little 2-in. pots.

Says Kelley, “I don’t see it going anywhere other than up.” **GT**