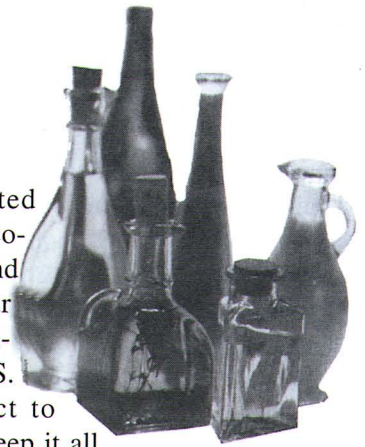


# Taste of Success: Selling Gourmet Foods

Gourmet foods continue to grow in popularity with retail consumers, according to Diane Chiasson of Chiasson Consultants Inc., Toronto, Ontario. Chiasson was on hand to give a seminar to interested retailers at the recent CGTA gift show in Mississauga.

Properly merchandised and marketed gourmet foods can add to the bottom line of selected florists too. If you do decide to carry foods in your store, choose premium goods that are not readily available in the neighbourhood

grocers. Chiasson cited specialty coffees, chocolate, confectionaries and gourmet popcorn as four of the current top-10 selling food gifts in the US. Carry enough product to make an impact, and keep it all together in one area of your shop.



When creating displays group complimentary items together and keep your design principles in mind ... 3's 5's and 8's etc. Also use gift ware to accent your products. Display tea pots with exotic tea leaves and gardening books and tools.

An important selling tool in the gourmet food business is product sampling. Let your staff taste the food and educate them on the unique properties of each food. Host regular samplings especially on weekends and holidays for your customers. Specialty retailers experience up to 75% increases in sales of key products after product sampling. Don't let your samplings turn into free lunches! Use packaged product to create dynamic displays beside the sample dishes and use great signage to describe the food in case you are busy with other customers.

Try to obtain product for sampling from your suppliers. Don't always expect to get this product for free, but it is reasonable to ask for a discount.

Chiasson cautions not to discount your slow movers. Repackage them or use them in gift baskets. Gift baskets are a great way to move one-only's from your inventory and keeping customers from thinking the product is old. You can mix seasonal items with non-seasonal to avoid being stuck at the end of the season. Studies in the US indicate that food -stuffs (i.e.. gift baskets) has risen to the top of corporate gift giving and now accounts for 33% of purchases. This may sound like bad news to the traditional florist, but who better to fill those gift baskets than the quick thinking florist of the nineties.

As with fresh flowers, foodstuffs require careful inventory control and FIFO—*first-in-first-out* is mandatory. Chiasson recommends using coded price stickers to keep track. i.e.. 698031=13 August 96. Cleanliness is also imperative. No one wants to buy dusty food products from the bottom shelf where you swept your garbage.

Displaying your new food section is not much different than other products in your store. Use good signage, proper lighting, vary heights and back drops and inspire customers to buy!

**C&D**

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