



A Winning Recipe

How to Spice up Your Housewares Department

A visiting chef at **The Kitchen at Alamo Hardware** shows customers how to cook up a tasty dish.

Most Saturday mornings, Dianne McArthur, manager of The Kitchen at Alamo Hardware and Garden Center in Alamo, California, slides a pan of bacon into the oven. “Bacon cooking in the oven is all you really need to make the store smell good,” she says.

The Kitchen is Alamo Hardware’s high-end housewares store with a fully functional demonstration kitchen, where at least twice a month she hosts cooking demonstrations from local and celebrity chefs.

McArthur has figured out that housewares is one category where she can get all of her customers’ senses engaged.

While you may not be able to get a celebrity chef in your store for a cooking demonstration, even small changes can go a long way to driving more sales through this department. To help, *Hardware Retailing* editors spoke with three retailers who have kicked up the flavor in their houseware’s departments and increased sales:

- **Alamo Hardware and Garden Center**, Alamo, California. Dave Re, purchasing manager, and McArthur built a unique experience for shoppers who want upscale kitchen items and to learn about cooking.
- **Tediche Home Hardware Building Centre**, Cap-Pele, New Brunswick, Canada. Conrad LeBlanc and his team brought housewares front and center on the salesfloor and created a store-within-a-store format. Sales have steadily increased.
- **Island Home Center & Lumber** in Vashon, Washington. Melissa Bailey, housewares manager, has the challenge of being a one-stop shop for her customers’ housewares needs so they don’t have to leave the island.

Take a look at what these retailers are doing in each of their operations to gain inspiration. We’ve compiled a collection of photos from other retailers, both inside and outside of the industry, online at TheRedT.com/1J10DDf. Finally, to get the best look at the range of products today’s top manufacturers have to offer, make plans to attend one of the shows dedicated to the category. A good place to start is the International Home + Housewares Show, which will be held March 5-8 in Chicago.

Alamo Hardware and Garden Center



Become the Event Center

Events at the Kitchen at Alamo Hardware are so popular, people pay to attend. McArthur hosts one or two events a month, including cooking demonstrations and book signings by celebrity chefs. She also realizes that it's not just women buying housewares. "Men buy these items too," she says. "This year, we're planning on having a men's night as well as a ladies' night. We'll have cooking classes for the men and barbeque classes for the women." She has a chalkboard in the store to list all upcoming events and sends announcements via Facebook, Twitter, email and a direct mailing list of 50,000 homes.



Give Staff Ownership

Housewares vendors often bring in samples to Alamo Hardware for employees to take home and try. Just like any department in the store, it's important employees understand how to use the kitchen products they're selling. And an occasional free pot or pan is a nice perk for employees. To further encourage employees to take ownership in housewares, McArthur gives them the freedom to set up creative displays. "I encourage them to take pictures of unique ideas they find and bring them as suggestions of what we can do here," she says. "I want them to know it's not just me making all of the decisions."



Stay on Top of Trends

To help her stay on top of housewares trends, McArthur subscribes to specialty cooking magazines and is part of a professional organization focused on the category. She also attends shows every year, including the National Hardware Show® and the International Home + Housewares Show, along with her distributor's market to stay on top of what's new in the industry. "As an independent retailer, I can't keep up with everything, so I rely on vendors to tell me what's new," says McArthur. She has a few vendors she keeps in close contact with throughout the year who can also keep her updated on industry trends.

Tediche Home Hardware Building Centre



Create Moveable Displays

"More than any other department in the store, presentation in housewares is everything," says LeBlanc. There are many other options for consumers to buy housewares and home decor goods, so it's important LeBlanc's team create customized displays that will grab their attention. Some of the display units have casters, so it's easy to move them to different areas of the department and keep it looking fresh. Make changes to your housewares displays at least once a month to keep your customers looking and aware of what's new in the category.



Don't Forget The Cashiers

Housewares sales at Tediche Home Hardware Building Centre jumped when LeBlanc moved the department to the front of the store. But that also means the cashier is often the first employee the customer will see, and likely the first person they will ask questions of in the department. LeBlanc makes sure all of his cashiers have product knowledge training on housewares items so they can answer basic questions. Training on basic housewares product knowledge will boost your customer service levels and will create the perception among consumers that your store is a destination for the category.



Focus On Variety

"Shoppers are looking for variety in housewares as much, if not more, than any other department in the store," says LeBlanc. Variety in both brand and style are important when considering how to structure your assortment. You may not have space for multiple versions of every product, but displaying a few key items in a variety of colors and styles shows you offer variety with other items as well, even if you place special orders. Carry that same principle into circular advertising, too, which LeBlanc says is the best way to promote housewares. Circulars highlight product variety and show it is a housewares destination.

Island Home Center & Lumber



Focus on Themes

One way to bring a greater sense of cohesion to the housewares department is to pick a theme and dig deeper into the products surrounding it. At Island Home Center & Lumber, Bailey and her team often create displays that fit themes. For example, many of the locals are fans of the Seattle Seahawks. So, the store has an endcap devoted to Seahawk items. Since the store is on an island, she utilizes that theme as well. Many of the housewares products have a nautical and beachy feel, which her customers are likely to want. "Stick to themes your customers will be drawn to, and almost all of your products will fly off the shelves."



Go Beyond White Pegboard

In the housewares department at Island Home Center & Lumber, customers will see many displays, but pegboard will not be featured on any of them. "We want to sell items to our customers, not pegboard, so we make sure our displays and endcaps are beautifully done," Bailey says. She says changing endcaps and moving things around can be time-consuming, but it's necessary for success. Bailey relies on her team of employees to help supply creative merchandising ideas, whether it's something they've seen at another store or something they want to create.



Create a Word of Mouth Buzz

Island Home Center & Lumber has increased its number of female shoppers since starting its annual Ladies' Night 11 years ago. Thanks to a growing housewares department, the last event brought in 1,500 guests who browsed the store and enjoyed wine and food. "When this event began, husbands would give their wives lists of items they wanted them to buy at Ladies' Night," Bailey says. "Now, women shop for the items they want, which are often fun housewares items." An annual event helps your customers keep your store in mind. It can also be a great way to build clientele and discover what customers want you to stock. ➡