

Case Study - Russells Garden Centre

Company Background






Russells Garden Centre was established in 1946, run as a small business selling bare-root plants and basic garden essentials. Taken over in 1996 by husband and wife team, Lesley and Richard Phillips maintained the family run ethos whilst extending and updating the store by introducing a restaurant and tearoom to cater for the ever changing needs of today's public.

Russells aim is to become the area's leading garden centre, offering value and quality with a strong environmental emphasis.

Sustainability Initiatives

Over the past couple of years Russells Garden Centre, driven by a passion to help protect the environment has undertaken several initiatives to reduce the impact of its operation and encourage sustainable gardening practices both at the Centre and to its customers. Russells has developed a reputation for itself as an environmentally aware and sustainable gardening centre, opting for a natural biological approach to managing its products, such as the zero use of chemicals for pest and disease control.

Summary of Key Achievements

- No fertilisers, pesticides or herbicides are used at the garden centre 
- Increased public awareness of sustainable gardening and the "greener" options 
- Reduced water consumption by removing inefficient overhead watering system 
- Introduced sustainable pest controls at garden centre by using biological pest control techniques 
- Improved energy efficiency of garden centre through upgrading of heating system and insulation of building 
- Active member of the local community helping to ensure sustainable local economy and promote environmental awareness 

KEY



Contribution to a Sustainable Economy

Based and run in a small rural community, Russells Garden Centre feels that it has a responsibility to the local community. The company actively seeks local suppliers and producers where possible, such as for stationery, plants, shrubs, trees, charcoal and cards by local artist etc. It believes in developing strong working relationships with its suppliers.

Sustainable criteria is built into its decision making and purchasing policy, environmentally friendly products are sourced wherever possible, offering such products at a lower mark up price to encourage its customers to choose such options. These products are also displayed and advertised prominently around the garden centre. Russells actively encourages suppliers to meet high standards. Russells is constantly striving to source new products from sustainable supply chains.

Enhancing Environmental Quality

Russells minimises the amount of disposable waste going to landfill through segregating and recycling tins, jars, plastics, bottles and newspapers. The used plant trays are offered to customers free of charge, though it does ask for a small charitable donation for one of the causes they support. Cardboard packaging is also re-used for the packaging of customers' purchases.

The overhead watering system has been replaced by a more efficient 'hands on' approach, watering is now done by hand directly into the pot which has led to the conservation of vast amounts of water, only providing what the plant needs. It also has water butts collecting rainwater which is used for watering of plants, thus reducing the demands on mains supplies. Other initiatives have also been put in place to minimise water consumption, mulches and water retaining crystals are used in the plant areas to improve water retention, new toilets have been installed with water conserving flushes and all staff are encouraged not to be wasteful with water. Staff are also on hand to help customers reduce the watering demands of their gardens through the design and installation of micro-irrigation systems in the customer's gardens.

Russells makes efforts to reduce its energy consumption. Since reviewing the existing heating system a more efficient system is now under construction, replacing the original coal fired boiler with a more energy efficient oil fired burner with new radiators that will be thermostatically controlled. The recently constructed extension has also been insulated beyond the current building regulations to reduce energy wastage. All of these energy savings amount to significant savings to its operation.



Outside area that has been developed to promote care for the wildlife found in gardens

To help protect the local environment Russells does not use any fertilisers, pesticides or herbicides within the Centre. This policy was adopted in 2003 and is now fully implemented throughout its operation. Instead, pest control and disease are controlled using “greener” sustainable options. For instance Russells has half a dozen chickens roaming around the garden centre controlling the slug population. Russells has found the transition away from chemicals relatively easy with a little thought and is cheaper than traditional chemical controls. Such controls have a number of benefits to the environment and financially. It is also a good mechanism for marketing/sales as customers are attracted by the environmentally friendly alternatives e.g. chickens roaming the garden centre. Managed properly, biological controls are also sustainable.

To reduce the impact of transportation Russells offers a free delivery service to local customers, which means the customers can ring through an order, enabling Russells to make a single collective delivery once a week. Having a local workforce, Russells encourages its staff to car share, cycle or walk to work. Many of its products are sourced locally reducing transportation miles, pottery from overseas is now also ordered directly from the factory to its garden centre.

Improving the Social Wellbeing of Stakeholders

Russells Garden Centre believes strongly in its social responsibility to the local community and undertakes a number of initiatives to support the community. All initiatives have a strong grounding in helping to educate the people they are in contact with on a regular basis to think more sustainably.

- Maintain several display notice boards giving wildlife information, details of the charities it supports and posters promoting local events. It also produces leaflets for customers to take away providing information on wildlife care and plant species that attract wildlife

- Developed a strong relationship with Brent Lodge Wildlife Hospital, in West Sussex. In June of 2003 it held a very successful Environmental Day, to coincide with World Environment Day. Guest speakers and wildlife experts attended the day, all with an environmental theme helping to educate the members of the public to think about the environment, its protection and its impact. All the proceeds from the day were donated to the wildlife hospital

Building on this success, further plans are in the pipeline for similar days in November 2004 and spring 2005.

Other involvement with charities include monthly coffee mornings for a local hospice and sponsorship of a local yacht race.

Russells has links with local schools, offering work experience placements, donating plants, working with conservation clubs and inviting local schools to visit the centre for talks on the environment and its protection.

Russells supports two local horticultural clubs, providing them with privilege cards plus regular newsletters containing advice on gardening and environmental issues.

Russells maintains good working relationships with its suppliers, inviting them to talk to staff regarding new products and their associated benefits, providing the staff with training and knowledge, which they can then use to advise and educate the customers.

Continuing Russells strong beliefs in educating its customers and improving its environmental awareness, it hopes to develop plans for an educational centre at the garden centre providing information and visual displays for adults and children, thus complimenting the existing wildlife pond area.

Russells is also looking into opportunities to open a farm shop as an outlet opportunity for local growers to retail home grown produce. This will increase its links with local growers and the public whilst increasing its customer base.



Russells provides informative displays to improve its customers environmental awareness

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