



## Garden Centers of America: Together We're Better!

### GCA's Key Connections: Member Profile

**Angi Davis, Owner**

**Monarch Landscaping & Garden Center, Auburn, IL**

### Passionate Gardener Takes A 'Dig' At Running Her Own Landscape & Garden Center



When customers utter the words, "This is what a garden center should look like," you know you're doing something right. And that's exactly how Angi Davis, Owner of Monarch Landscaping & Garden Center in Auburn, IL, feels when she hears customers say that about her business.

Landscaping is the independent retailer's main focus, and Angi employs a team of landscape experts who can handle all aspects of customers' outdoor renovation projects – from landscape architecture to design, installation and comprehensive maintenance. Her crews operate most of the year, starting in April and working through until early November.

"It's exciting to see a project get started and the joy on the homeowner's face, once it's done," Angi says. "That is the best part. And why I got into this. I like the makeover process."

Even though landscape projects are the business' bread and butter, that doesn't stop the store from offering annuals, perennials, natives, trees, shrubs and the area's largest selection of ceramic pottery. Garden ornaments, birdhouses/feeders and garden structures round out the garden shop's collection.



While Angi maintained a passion for gardening all her life, she wasn't always in the garden and landscape business. Accruing more than 25 years of experience, Angi came from the corporate world, where she owned and operated Quorum Consulting Group.

"I've always been outside in my garden – always, no matter where I lived," she says. "I just had a passion for it."



She still owns the consulting company, which specializes in accounting and 401k services, in conjunction with Monarch Landscaping. And it's through her first company that she stumbled upon Monarch Landscaping, which was called Andrew's Landscapes, at the time.

Andrew's Landscapes went to Quorum for bookkeeping services; Angi would pick up the owner's financial records on her way to the office.

Then, Angi heard that the owner was interested in selling the business. Since the former landscape-only company was on the path between her home and consulting business, Angi felt it was a perfect match. She officially took over the landscape business in November 2015, then added the retail garden center by April 2016.

Angi has many years of experience running her own business, but a retail garden center operation is a whole different type of beast. That's why she feels attending industry garden center tours and trade shows, like the IGC Show, is so important in order to expand her retail business knowledge.

"The networking during these tours and trade shows is really fabulous," she says. "You have the opportunity to talk with other independent garden center people to see how they're dealing with the same problems we have and find those unusual things that customers are looking for."

The camaraderie between independent garden centers, especially among GCA members, and the information they're willing to share has helped shape Angi's business practices and her retail garden shop.

"With being a new garden center, trying to understand the best way to attract customers and find the products people want to buy can be difficult," she says. "So, that network of independent garden center people is incredibly important. You learn so much from them,



especially the mistakes that they feel they made. Getting their life experience is worth a million dollars.”

## Dazzling Customers With Technology & Diverse Options

In addition to extensive landscaping services and staple plant varieties, Monarch Landscaping differentiates itself with rocks, stocking sizes as large as boulders and as tiny as pebbles. “It’s crazy how many people love rocks,” jokes Angi. “We added five different kinds of decorative rock last year, and three colors of mulch, so homeowners had choices.”

She also extended the store’s line of shrubs and brought in more mature plants, so they’re bigger and more established – an added bonus that customers miss out on if they shop at the big boxes. And these additions paid off; the larger rocks, mature shrubs and ceramic pottery were last year’s best-sellers.



Staying on top of the hottest consumer trends, Monarch Landscaping carries a healthy selection of air plants, succulents, fairy gardening supplies and terrariums. Angi makes sure to stock organic potting soil and compost to appeal to Millennials and other environmentally friendly shoppers.

Furthering the store’s – and Angi’s – interest in taking care of the environment, Angi is a board member of the Friends of Sangamon Valley organization, which focuses on conservation of the Sangamon Valley area by planting prairies and through other efforts.

With almost three years in the garden and landscape business under her belt, Angi is still finding ways to create a unique in-store experience that encourages customers to come back again and again. She’s testing the water with events, hoping to tap into air plants and terrariums as a special focus, but the real draw is the 3D landscape designs that bring customers’ homes and projects to life.

The program allows landscape designers to draw the customer’s house perfectly, then add landscape materials so the customer can see the design in real time. Changes can be made right on-site according to the customer’s preference and vision. The drawing is projected onto a large screen and animated, so the customer can walk through the design and see it as if it were real.

Later, the designers put the videos up on YouTube so customers can share them with friends and family or access them after they leave the store. Needless to say, the feature is a big hit.

Angi says, “Everybody loves it. We get that, ‘Oh my gosh,’ reaction.”