

*As the weather cools down, shoppers begin to focus on cold-busters and gift giving. The best merchandising plans will incorporate many facets of the natural products store.*

## A Word on Winter

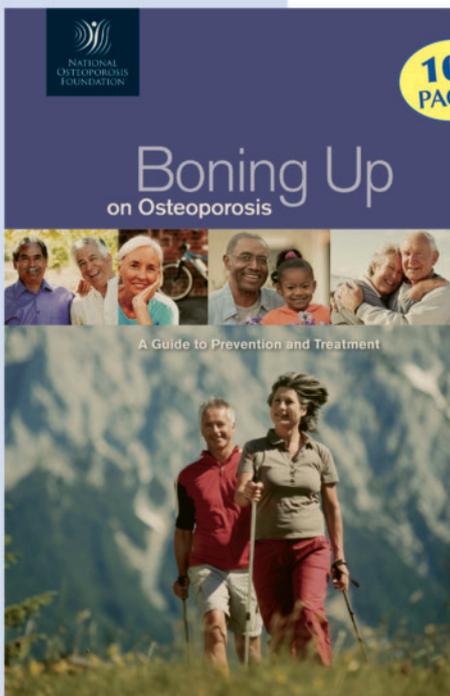
BY MELISSA KVIDAHL

**T**hough squeezing out the last drops of summer may be top of mind for many around the country this month, natural product retailers know that cold and flu season is

right around the corner. As such, establishing a merchandising plan for the winter months is something natural products retailers need to start considering now.

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According to Angela Guerrant, vice president of sales at Gaia Herbs (Brevard, NC), the past year has spawned a heightened awareness about the importance of maintaining a strong immune system, and many new consumers entered the category of natural immune support supplements and herbs. "As a result, the market grew substantially for retailers and manufacturers alike, and with cold and flu season just around the corner, the opportunity to re-engage those new natural consumers in taking control of their immune health with natural products is tremendous," she added.

Indeed, Nancy Angelini, national science educator at Source Naturals (Scotts Valley, CA), agreed that as the weather cools, sales of immune supporting supplements get red hot. "From our point of view as a wholesale supplement manufacturer, shoppers are looking for prod-

ucts to support immune health and function, but also ingredients and compounds necessary to the body to support balanced health and optimal energy during the winter season—these can cover a wide range of topics," she said.

This wide range of topics can span the aisles of the natural product store, offered Santosh Krinsky, president of Lotus Light Natural Body Care (Silver Lake, WI). Customers are looking for immune boosters, for sure, but they are also looking for other wintertime staples such as "comfort items" like herb teas, bath salts, candles, salt lamps, essential oils or incense, he said. "Lotions and moisturizers to ward off dry skin, and lip balms to protect lips from winter chapping, are also important," Krinsky continued. "Nasal cleansing products (neti pots) are also big to keep the nasal passages moisturized and clear. Then there are the

syrops, elixirs and homeopathic remedies such as oscillococinum that are very important in the winter months. Yoga and pilates tools are useful for people who want to get their exercise, but are stuck in the house due to the weather. And lest we forget that the Christmas season is part of winter and thus, gift giving is also important."

In order to most sensibly sift through all these winter-appropriate products and merchandising opportunities, Krinsky said, it is critical to maintain simplicity. "The main thing is to focus the winter-appropriate products together and create thematic signage that has the over-arching winter theme as well as some of the sub-themes such as 'protect your skin,' 'cold season essentials,' 'brave the out of doors,' 'indoor comfort to keep out the cold,' etc.," he said.

"No matter the theme, it's important

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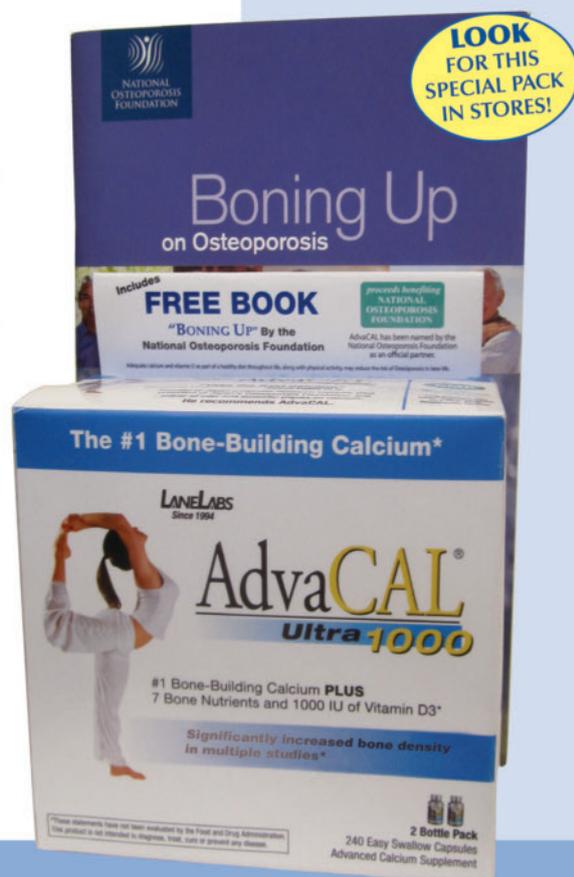
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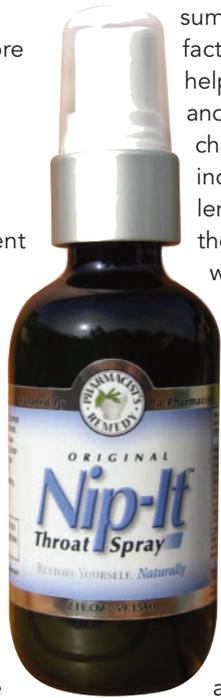
# Health Product Merchandising

to keep it simple," agreed Guerrant. "Focus on no more than two or three products, and offer great value with clear signage."

## Immunity, Cold and Flu

Without a doubt, supplement stores will be focusing predominantly on immunity and cold and flu remedies throughout the winter months. "In fact, adults may have up to four colds per year, while children can have up to 10 colds per year," explained Afrouz Alex Nikmanesh, CEO of Pharmacist's Remedy (Irvine, CA), maker of the Nip-It Throat Spray, a sore throat mixture of vitamins, minerals and herbs. "Focus on the idea that prevention is better than cure. Why? Prevention is simply a much healthier, easier and less expensive way to beat an illness."

"There is an old saying that the best offense is a good defense," agreed Angelini. "If we can provide the con-



sumer with high-quality, well-manufactured, well-thought out products to help strengthen their immune systems and prepare them for the upcoming changes in seasonal weather and increased exposure to immune challenges, we can help them to help themselves to a healthier, happier winter season."

Angelini suggested that retailers consider adding vitamin D and fish oils to a wintertime display, as recent scientific research suggests the importance of adding these two nutrients. "Also, adrenal function is always important for optimal immune function, so retailers might consider Planetary Herbals' Schisandra Adrenal Complex (suitable for children and adults), Rehmannia Vitalizer, Rehmannia Endurance and Ginseng Revitalizer. Other products might include Echinacea-Goldenseal Liquid and Full Spectrum Andrographis," she added. "They all support either balanced energy or immune system function and balance."

Along these lines, Guerrant

suggested adding an everyday formula for combating stress, like Gaia Herbs' Adrenal Health, in addition to a high potency, organic greens formula for immunity.

"In addition, it would be astute merchandising to look at strengthening children's immune systems," suggested Angelini. "As they become affected by seasonal winter imbalances, children generally 'share' these imbalances with the rest of the family."

## Timing is Everything

To ensure that shelves are winter-ready when the first flu hits, manufacturers and distributors offered suggestions to retailers with regards to timing.

According to Guerrant, back-to-school merchandising and the start of immune season displays go hand in hand. "If we look to big-box retailers as an example (based on the resources they have to research and design well executed merchandising and promotional campaigns), we notice that they set the back-to-school items to include some cross over into immune support, and then transition more heavily into immune in September," she said. "It makes perfect sense."

Source Naturals' Wellness Formula is incredibly popular among shoppers and retailers alike, so Angelini stressed the importance of ordering early—as early as August. "Don't wait to join the rush right after the first winter storm hits," she said. "If you don't want to have a lot of product on hand at all times, incentivise it and stress the wisdom of buying early." And when it comes to stocking, Angelini agreed that September is the perfect time. "Give people a reason to stock up early," she advised. "If your customer's health declines at all during the harsh seasons of the year, you will have help on hand and your customers will remember where to shop for immediate satisfaction." **VR**

## For More Information:

- Gaia Herbs, (800) 831-7780
- Lotus Light Natural Body Care, (262) 889-8501
- Pharmacist's Remedy, (714) 389-3900
- Source Naturals, (800) 777-5677

## Tips for a Happy, Healthy Holiday Plan

It's undeniable that wintertime, for many, means the onset of the holiday season. While shoppers stock up on cold and flu busters, they may also seek out some of the many natural and organic personal care or specialty items available to give as gifts. Lotus Light Natural Body Care's Krinsky suggested that, for retailers looking to tap into the holiday frenzy, early November is an ideal time to start setting out displays tar-

geted to the gift-buying crowd. "Even if they are not all buying right away, they are weighing their options and making decisions," he said.

One strategy that Krinsky recommended is stocking up on specials at Expo East, to time delivery for late October or early November.

Regardless of whether retailers choose to merchandise around a holiday, it's important to remain sensitive to different cultures, by

supporting an overall holiday theme rather than a specific holiday—"Healthy Gifts for the Holidays" is one theme Krinsky offered that is suitable to most.

"We are addressing health issues here, and they cross denominational boundaries," said Source Naturals' Angelini. "They apply to everyone, regardless of a particular holiday—stress the benefits of being well and healthy for all of the holidays coming up."