

Sizzling Stock Pet Waterers

Making a Splash

Manufacturers of pet waterers aim to combine aesthetics and functionality.

By Angela Pham

Waterers for this year's summer months are shaping up to be full of new colors, textures and designs in every pet category. Easy-to-clean, low-maintenance and durable waterers are in demand for dog, cat, bird and small animal owners alike, and manufacturers are placing a strong emphasis on updating their watering products accordingly.

Veterinary Ventures, a manufacturer based in Reno, Nev., is producing its best-selling automatic waterer, the Drinkwell 360, in a new stainless-steel format this summer. Although long produced in plastic, the Drinkwell will soon be produced in the rust-free metal to satisfy customers who say their cats have a plastic allergy, said marketing coordinator Kristyn Lingenfelter. Altogether, she said she's noticed a recent consumer tendency to look for a wider selection in their pets' waterer options.

"Stainless-steel is more hygienic than plastic, and it lasts better over time," Lingenfelter said. "I think more than anything, consumers are really looking for different materials...a lot of ceramics are coming to the market, and the stainless-steel options in addition to ours."

She said Veterinary Ventures has also recently designed new packaging for the Platinum fountain models for merchandising purposes.

"We came out with a new dog version of packaging for our strongest-selling Platinum model, more so for the pet stores to merchandise differently," Lingenfelter said. "This way, cat owners aren't wandering into the dog section and vice-versa. Same product, but two different packages."

Watering stations such as this one allow for both water and food and lend themselves to both cats and small dogs.



COURTESY OF HARRY BIRD CORP.

Clean and green are two keyword components in waterers. At Super Pet, a small-animal accessories manufacturer in Elk Grove Village, Ill., senior marketing manager Judy Heffron said that although they've long produced water bottles for small animals that are made of BPA-free, chew-proof and recycled-glass materials, the industry is just recently overhauling itself to meet the trends. Like many other sectors in the pet-care industry, waterer trends reflect the preferences of people who are constantly looking for ways to avoid unnecessary chemicals and biodegradable materials in their own lives.

"It's become a macro trend," Heffron said. "Suddenly it's a marketing point now,

For summer this year, Super Pet is releasing new gravity waterers for birds that are designed to reduce the messiness that thirsty and bathing birds often cause. Heffron said that in the past year they have improved their designs and upgraded their bottles to have drip-free nozzles and double ball bearings to meet customer expectations for easier cleanup. With these updated features, leaks are kept to a minimum.

Even wild bird waterers are getting an update this summer with cleaner, more attractive and greener options for consumers. Happy Bird Corporation, out of Weston, Mass., is introducing an all-season wild bird Solar Sipping watering station that sports an outer blue bowl with a translucent top that uses greenhouse solar principles to filter light and keep the water at ideal temperatures, according to president Thomas Hollyday.

"Its carefully researched blue color is designed to be attractive to birds and people in garden locations," Hollyday said.

Although function still comes first, Mark Grambart, president and CEO of Contech, a manufacturer based in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, said fashion is still a factor for consumers looking for the best waterer for their pets' needs. Recognizing this preference, Contech recently released its DrinkBetter water bowl in new colors that include a bright fuchsia.

"People not only want a very functional product, but something that looks really good," Grambart said. "They want fashion, but they also want innovation."

Colors like pink and blue are best-sellers for waterers, likely based on the sex of their pets, said store owner Pablo Sanchez of Kookaburras Pet & Nature Store, in Royal Palm Beach, Fla.

"They always have a lot of passion for the colors," he said.

At Goody's Pet Supply, a retail store in Wayne, Mich., store manager Tom Swim said electric bowls are gaining popularity for dog owners whose dogs spend some time outdoors in cooler seasons. He has also noticed more collapsible bowls gaining ground in sales. And among the small animal-owning customers at his store, he sees a steady preference for bottles over bowls.

"Bowls are messy for some small animals—anything from hamsters on up—from throwing bedding in their bowl," Swim said. "Water bottles tend to stay cleaner; they're a space-saver and tend to hold more water." He added that owners who add vitamins to their pets' water or owners who travel frequently are favoring bottles as well.

Still, good old-fashioned bowls remain the top choice for at least one pet category.

"Bowls are commonly used for snakes to soak in and drink in, as well as little fountains used to simulate moving water to entice reptiles to drink," Swim said. ■

According to the 2009-2010 APPA National Pet Owners Survey, only 3 percent of 463 cat owners had planned to purchase an automatic water-dispensing device in the next 12 months, suggesting pet specialty retailers have an opportunity to vamp sales in this category.

with 'green' being the word. We're going through a whole new packaging change to spell out more of our features and benefits, bringing them front and center."

Super Pet's product development manager for small animals, Allyson Schmidt, said waterers that are easily attached to habitats and cages are a primary concern for their lines, as well.



COURTESY OF HARRY BIRD CORP.

Year-round and seasonal wild bird waterers are a natural extension of the companion-bird watering category.

