



## A Big Patch of Success

*Mail-order catalog turns crafts into cash for two local women.*

By Rochelle Loudermilk

Thirteen years ago, Vickie Hutchins was toiling away the winter making wooden cut-outs to sell at a local craft fair when she decided it would be far easier to peddle other people's handiworks than to make them all herself. Her neighbor JoAnn Martin agreed, and before long the two Delaware residents had created Gooseberry Patch—a mail-order business that now sells more than 400 products worldwide.

What began as a small catalog business run from a kitchen table during their children's nap times has become a multi-million dollar company offering hand-made home accessories, country crafts and antique-inspired decorations.

Martin, a former first grade teacher, says they traveled the Midwest in search of just the right products to sell and the right artisans to craft them. They found most of their craftspeople at craft shows and through connections at national gift markets.

In addition to crafters and creations, Martin and Hutchins needed cold hard cash. The entrepreneurial pair invested their personal savings in the company, hired some consultants and later received a grant from the Ohio Industrial Training Program.

Now, popular products such as the "heart-in-hand" cookie cutter—symbolizing "hands to work, hearts to God"—are returning their investments. Among the hand-made items shown in the Gooseberry Patch catalog are aromatic candles, wall hangings, cookie cutters shaped like ladybugs and gift baskets filled with all kinds of goodies.

Some 4 million copies of the catalog are produced several times a year. The booklets feature the drawings of 20 different artists, including customers, who create illustrations of every item. "We make people want to keep it," says Martin of the photograph-less publication.

In addition to the catalog, the company also publishes hardcover cookbooks and books in the Country



Gooseberry women JoAnn Martin (left) and Vickie Hutchins publish some 4 million catalogs several times a year for customers all over the world. Their Delaware-based Gooseberry Patch mail-order business comes more than 400 products—from ladybug-shaped cookie cutters to aromatic candles—that are made by Midwest artisans.

Friends Collection, which follows recurring characters through a hodgepodge of craft ideas, decorating tips and recipes.

This growth has brought some changes, though. Hutchins and Martin now rely more on craft show vendors who can mass-produce products, and the two have moved their business to a bigger facility across town.

Soon, Gooseberry Patch will reach even more people: Their latest cookbook is being offered in another company's gift catalog, and are being considered for the Book of the Month

Club. Talks with another publisher may lead to a *Best of Gooseberry Patch* coffee table book.

For now, the successful duo just hope to continue improving their business amid the casual clutter of Hutchins' office and their traditional home lives, and to keep appreciating its current rewards. As Martin wonders, "Who knows how long it will last?"

Gooseberry Patch can now be found online at [www.delnet.net/~gbspatch/](http://www.delnet.net/~gbspatch/), or call 800/85-GOOSE for catalog information.