



Has the "Green Thumb Bandit" struck Alton?

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EAST ALTON – Are potted plants on porches in peril?

East Alton resident Laura Blair said she recently lost her green hen and chicks succulents she has raised for the better part of a decade. She took to social media with the posting, which seems like an insignificant theft, only to discover more people in the area have also suffered the loss of potted plants – especially succulents – in the Riverbend area. They're not alone, either, as recently as the end of last month, three St. Clair County landscaping and gardening shops were robbed of some of their supplies and plants. St. Louis media has even nicknamed the culprit the “Green-Thumbed Bandit.” But has she struck in this area?

Jennifer Ickes, who posted under Blair's Facebook announcement of the theft, said her yard was targeted in March of this year. She had two large potted cacti taken from her yard as well as some gardening statues and a watering can. She thinks the suspect may be the “Green-Thumbed Bandit.”

Sandy Richter, who owns Sandy's Back Porch, a nursery and landscaping business in Belleville, caught the thief on her surveillance system after several incidents, including finding out-of-place bushes in her shrubberies and having a potted plant set aside for an employee's daughter's wedding go missing.

“One Saturday, one of my employees came in and said I should check the cameras, because some of the bushes were in the shrubs,” Richter said. “The following weeks, a potted plant was set aside for a the wedding of one of our employee's daughters and it came up missing. I asked around to see if anyone sold it by mistake.”

When she discovered no one sold the special plant, Richter decided it was time to check the surveillance cameras – a process which took hours.

After checking them, she discovered a woman, now dubbed the “Green Thumb Bandit,” had entered her store on several occasions at the end of August and taken as much as \$1,000 worth of merchandise. Richter believes the woman knew exactly what to take and had experience as a landscaper.



“She was strong enough to lift the bags of mulch and dirt with no problem,” she said. “She threw them onto the carts and took them off.”

The woman appeared to drive an Infiniti FX45 and Richter said she had a very obvious tattoo on her left outer calf, which she believes will eventually lead to her identity.

Ickes said she has compared the surveillance footage taken by Richter with footage taken from a business across the street from her home and, while she cannot prove the two people are the same, she said the woman who took her cacti very much resembles the woman who Richter said stole from her establishment.

Captain Mike Dixon of the Madison County Sheriff's Office said calls for stolen potted plants from porches rarely reach his desk and thefts at the magnitude of Richter's have not been reported, but said many times people – especially kids – will steal plants and ornaments from people's yard as acts of vandalism.

Blair believes this is not the case. She said her well-manicured hens and chicks were special and that whoever took them knew what they were stealing. She said large succulents like the cacti stolen from Ickes are also valuable, adding again whoever took them knew what they were stealing.

Richter believes this woman is working in the landscaping business.