3 tips for future success

PREPARE FOR THE 2012 SEASON BY RESPONDING TO ECONOMIC CHALLENGES.

BY JAMIE J. GOOCH

A s the old saying goes, “if it were easy to do, everyone would do it.” By that measure, it must be easy to tell the future. This time of year, there is no shortage of prognosticators predicting everything from landscape plant color choices to popular accessories to overall design trends for 2012.

While it’s impossible to know exactly what’s coming, and specific tastes vary by region (and even client), the big picture is largely the same. The economy dominates the presidential debates, dinner table discussion and the 24-hour news cycle. It will dominate 2012 landscape designs as well.

1. Renovate landscapes. Rather than starting from scratch, develop services and pricing plans that allow you to spruce up budget-conscious property owners’ landscapes without breaking the bank. Use high-impact specimen plantings and pops of color to add needed design elements to existing landscapes when possible. Get your foot in the door with small changes that make big impacts and build your customer base. Smaller changes over time can still lead to a dramatically different landscape, though it may take multiple seasons to accomplish. Keep all those changes moving in the right direction by offering to create a long-term master plan for clients. In addition to being critical to a cohesive landscape design, a master plan engages clients in the future of their landscape and helps make them repeat customers.

2. Save water. After an initial installation investment, a well-designed irrigation system starts paying the property owner back by saving water costs. Whether replacing an inefficient system or installing a new irrigation system, less maintenance is also a selling point. Putting the right amount of water in the right place can also reduce the need for disease control inputs because it helps prevent fungal and mold growth. Landscapers can even offer lower-tech services to help property owners conserve water, such as rain barrel sales and installation, or installation of rain gardens to collect runoff. Rain gardens can be planted with deep-rooted plants that make use of extra water as it’s collected.

The money-saving benefits of water-wise plants, too, should be communicated to your clients. Breeders have successfully reduced many popular plants’ water requirements.

“Plants bred to withstand attacks from pests and diseases that are also tolerant..."
of climate and soil extremes provide a better value,” states Anthony Tesselaar, cofounder and president of Tesselaar Plants, in a recent news release. “Gardeners are more aware than ever that choosing the right plant for the right situation is imperative if you want to help save the planet — let alone your bank balance.”

3 Sell sustainability. The renewed interest in the environment in recent years is not slowing with the pace of the economy. In fact, the recession may have brought even more attention to the importance of sustainable landscapes.

Green roofs are one example of a growth area that owes its popularity to environmental awareness. From reducing heating and cooling costs, to improving air quality and lowering city temperatures, the benefits of green roofs are becoming too obvious for many city planners to ignore. Landscapers can learn the specialized skills needed to install green roofs themselves, or find partnering opportunities with progressive roofing companies who are installing the structures needed to top cities with green.

The focus on reducing our environmental impact by buying locally sourced products is a boon to local growers, nurseries and landscapers. It’s also an opportunity to market the benefits of native plants. Mixing native species in with more traditional cultivars can help lower the need for inputs and maintenance.

Edible landscapes have been making headlines for years. From modern victory gardens to the First Lady planting edibles at the White House, consumers have taken notice.

“Economic, nutritional, environmental and social interests are converging to elevate the practice of home vegetable gardening to mainstream relevance,” said Jessie Atchison, brand manager for Burpee Home Gardens, at an Edible Garden exhibition presented by the New York Botanical Garden during the 2010 growing season.

And edibles continue to make inroads into suburban back yards. In addition to being seen as providing “free” food, some clients also equate personal fruit and vegetable gardens with lessening the environmental footprint of shipping produce globally.

The economic benefits of a well-designed landscape are one thing, but the intangibles should not be forgotten. A beautiful landscape can provide your clients with a welcome respite from their economic anxieties.

Some property owners will certainly still be in a spending mood in 2012, but having service and pricing plans to appeal to all income levels looks like a safer bet this year than focusing only on the high end.

Gooch is a freelance writer and editor based in Northeast Ohio.
Just desserts
New in Terra Nova’s Crisp Series (which also includes ‘Blackberry Crisp,’ ‘Peach Crisp’ and new ‘Pear Crisp,’) ’Apple Crisp’ alum root features ruffled green leaves and a white veil. Its tight, compact mounding habit is suited for moderately well-drained, organic soil types in Zones 4 through 9. The heat-, drought- and humidity-tolerant plant attracts hummingbirds and offers nice winter color.
TerraNovaNurseries.com

Earned its stripes
Reaching 20 in. tall and 24 in. wide, Monrovia’s new Sun Stripe Agapanthus africanus ‘Mon-Kageyama’ is hardy in USDA Zones 8 through 11. Discovered by F.K. Nursery in Los Angeles, the center is green marbled with yellow stripes, bordered with a wide, soft yellow. Blue flower stalks appear in summer, thriving in perennial gardens or containers. It works well in morning sun, but appreciates dappled shade in hot afternoon. Monrovia.com

Worthy namesake
Hardy in USDA Zones 5 through 9, David Austin Roses’ repeat-flowering English Rose Rosa ‘Kew Gardens’ offers 2.5-in. flowers with five petals. Abundant single flowers are clustered in large heads, similar to a hydrangea. The young buds are soft apricot, opening to white with a hint of soft lemon behind the stamens. The flowers are followed by small red hips, which should be removed to encourage repeat flowering from early summer through the end of the season. Reaching approximately 5 ft. tall by 3 ft. wide, the healthy, thornless bush features upright growth. It was named in celebration of the 250th anniversary of Kew Gardens, the famous Royal Botanical Garden in London. DavidAustinRoses.com

Compact stature
As the dwarf form of the popular ‘Lime-light’ Hydrangea, Proven Winners’ ‘Little Lime’ is one-third the size of traditional hardy hydrangeas. Each year, the summer flowers on this deciduous shrub open soft green and turn pink and burgundy in fall. It does best in partial to full sun, and is hardy in USDA Zones 3 to 9. ProvenWinners.com

The bold and the beautiful
New for 2012, Gardenia jasminoides ‘Coconut Magic’ is a Ball Ornamentals exclusive. At 5 to 6 in. in diameter, its creamy white flowers are the largest of any gardenia, and have fragrant blooms all summer long, the company says. The low-maintenance plant slowly changes to golden yellow blooms over the season, and doesn’t need pruning. Both its height and spread range from 36 to 48 in., and it’s hardy in USDA Zones 8b to 11. BallHort.com

Hot, hot, hot
The Pelargonium interspecific ‘Caliente’ series from Syngenta Flowers/Goldsmith Seeds features dark foliage and free flowering qualities. This new class of geraniums is an ivy and zonal geranium cross, bred to have better heat tolerance. Colors include orange (pictured), pink and Hot Coral. SyngentaFlowersInc.com