

3 tips for **future** **success**

PREPARE FOR THE 2012 SEASON BY RESPONDING TO ECONOMIC CHALLENGES.

BY JAMIE J. GOOCH

ASTHE 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.

Lucky Red Flame Lantana stay upright all season, making them well-suited to small-space landscapes.

It's the economy

If you're a cup half full kind of person, you might predict the poor economy could actually lead homeowners to invest in their landscapes. After all, they're not taking vacations and they're not planning on selling anytime soon, so they want their properties to be as comfortable as possible. Maybe so, but as high unemployment rates continue, it's easy to see the cup as half empty. Abandoned properties don't need much in the way of landscaping, and as budgets shrink, the landscaping service may be one of the first to be cut.

One way to prepare for the worst and hope for the best is by offering services that appeal to recession-weary clients. What services can you provide that could save money for your clients?

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

A container garden featuring Tangerine Tango, the Pantone Color of the Year: Tropicanna Black cannas (top), ornamental peppers (lower left) and croton (lower right).

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

HOT COLOR FOR 2012

The world is an increasingly smaller place. From national television marketing campaigns by plant producers, fashion labels and even paint manufacturers to social networking among friends and families, design trends travel more quickly now than ever before.

Some of those "trends" are little more than hopeful soothsaying, but one in particular is backed up by some serious research.

Pantone LLC is well known to many who work with color.

Graphic artists, interior designers and fashion designers use the company's color swatch library regularly. Color is, literally, Pantone's business. So when the company announced "Tangerine Tango" (PANTONE 17-1463) as its color of the year for 2012, plant breeders and consumers paid attention.

"The color of the year selection is a very thoughtful process," according to a Pantone press release. "To arrive at the selection, Pantone quite literally combs the world looking for color influences. This can include the entertainment industry and films that are in production, traveling art collections, hot new artists, popular travel destinations and other socio-economic conditions. Influences may also stem from technology, availability of new textures and effects that impact color, and even upcoming sports events that capture worldwide attention."

Over the past several years, orange has grown in popularity and acceptance among designers and consumers alike, according to the company's research.

As clients hear about and see more orange shades, they may request a complementary color palette for their landscapes.

Anthony Tesselaar, cofounder and president of Tesselaar Plants, suggests using red-orange with other plants featuring subtle echoes of the same color: "Not too much of this fiery hue," he says. "A little goes a long way."

Or, since the orange-red tangerine color is opposite of blue-green on the color wheel, it could be grouped with frosty, cool-hued plants.

For more information on Tangerine Tango, visit www.pantone.com/coy2012.



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. **LM**

Gooch is a freelance writer and editor based in Northeast Ohio.



Can-Can Orange Calibrachoa (top) can be used to pinpoint spots of color. Bonfire begonias add a punch of tangerine color to the landscape (bottom).