

Seasonal color: Separating good from great

Landscape contractors and golf course superintendents reveal how they're satisfying clients' demand for reds, blues, yellows.

■ Today's landscape customers and golfers want to put more color into their homelife, working day and even recreational lives. And they want it for more than the few months of summer and early fall.

These clients increasingly are asking green industry professionals to provide this color with plant material, either flowers and/or interestingly colored/textured woody plants. Color isn't just strictly beds of annuals, as eye-catching as they almost always are. More and more customers—property managers, homeowners, golfers—want more imaginative uses of colorful plant material.

Here are the comments of some landscape professionals on the changing role of color:

Tom Deml, Somers Companies of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, Wisc.—“More customers are asking for plants that keep their color longer, and plants with different leaf colors and textures,” says Deml. Examples: red barberry, gold mound spirea and gold flame spirea.

Also, some clients specifically ask for plantings that retain color and interest (red twig dogwood) or plants that provide food for wildlife/songbirds in winter.

Clay Crosley, Findlay Country Club, Findlay, Ohio—Though most of the club's landscape color is in the clubhouse area, Crosley and his wife Sandy (course horticulturist) are trying to spread the effect

around. “We're trying to establish more beds on the course,” he says. We've got lots of impatiens and marigolds, and I'm trying tiger lilies along creekbanks. We try as many new things—like some of the stuff I see in magazines—as we can. But you have to remember that color is more expensive, time-consuming and labor-consuming.” The Crosleys put in 475 flats of annuals this spring. “People don't have to be good golfers to enjoy the course,” Crosley says.

Kathy Valentine, The Plant Professionals, Lansing, Mich.—Demand from the company's interior plantscape business forced it to offer outside bed plantings too. This spring, a research/manufacturing client hit hard by layoffs, demanded cheerfully bright annuals in its landscape—for the first time. “They wanted to improve the morale of the remaining employees,” says Valentine.

Kurt Kluznik, Yardmaster, Painesville, Ohio—“People are looking at the money they're putting into annuals. Once they've looked at it for a couple of years, they're more apt to plant perennials,” says Kluznik. Yardmaster routinely offers flowering plants, as an add-on sale, and promotes bulb sales and plantings each fall also. “People expect the grass to be cut and the plants to be pruned, but it's the color they remember from year to year,” says Kluznik.

James W. Zindel, Zindel's Tree and Lawn Care, Decatur, Ill.—Two recent examples of customers asking his company to turn up the color include a woman asking that the evergreens on her property be replaced by deciduous shrubs, and a priest helping plan a colorful display of flowers at the entrance to his church. “He was definite about what he wanted. ‘I want it to be a beautiful sight,’ he (the priest) said,” recalls Zindel. “So, we put in some bright and vivid colors.”

Jerry Merrill, Merrill Quality Landscapes, Rexburg, Idaho—“A lot of people have been telling me they want to get away from the solid green look,” says Merrill. “Usually, they say they'd like to see something like flowering shrubs. They seem to be a hot item right now, and I kind of like some of the new spireas with their different blossoms and shapes.”

Mark Smith, Bobby Byrd Lawn & Landscape, Charlotte, N.C.—“People still like annual flowers, something that we can change for them every spring and fall,” says Smith, a manager at this busy maintenance firm. In the spring: begonias, impatiens, geraniums. In the fall: pansies. They bloom all winter in Charlotte.

Kenneth Gerlack, Contra Costa Landscaping, Martinez, Calif.—“Our customers seem to really like to spruce up their entrances and focal points of their landscapes. Here in California, we change annuals twice a year, summer and winter.” Winter color means pansies and violets; in summer, it's marigolds and petunias. The extra water needed by some of the plants, however, is a drawback, considering the current water shortage in this state. “If we had a normal year, and water wasn't quite so scarce, the demand for color would just go crazy,” Gerlack notes.

Warren Klink, Urith Inc. (Urban Thickets), Hamilton, Ohio—“There is more interest in seasonal displays,” believes Klink. More customers are moving toward perennials. Customers are more sophisticated, and they want to be a part of the “process of color” from the first tender, green shoots of the plant, through its blossoming, and even into its decline, says Klink.

“Some dormant plants in winter are almost as interesting as when they're blooming. It's our job to make the customer aware of alternatives in addition to the impatiens,” he adds.

Low maintenance bedding plant annuals

■ "The easiest way to have a low-maintenance flower bed is to select flowers that essentially take care of themselves," says Terry Humfeld, executive director of the Professional Plant Growers Association.

Some annuals need regular grooming, others do not. To stimulate continuous blooming (from late spring through early fall), it may be necessary to cut back or pinch off existing blooms ("dead-head") once they begin to fade. Marigolds, snapdragons and zinnias need to be regularly dead-headed. However, ageratum, alyssum, begonias, impatiens, portulaca and vinca don't need dead-heading.

Some annuals need to be pruned to become bushy or to avoid becoming spindly, while others are naturally basal branching.

For example, grandiflora petunias, snapdragons and zinnias should be cut back to stimulate lateral branching, preferably when they are being transplanted. However, because multiflora petunias,



nicotiana, pansies, verbena and vinca naturally remain bushy, they save time by not needing periodic pruning.

Humfeld suggests these steps to make annuals easier to care for:

1) Transplant species requiring similar moisture requirements into the same flower bed.

2) Match each species to its optimum light requirement.

3) Mulch soon after the bedding plants have been transplanted.

4) Plan your design and keep it simple.

For easy-to-maintain flower beds, consider using the 20 types of flowering plants recommended by the PPGA in the accompanying chart.

—For more information on bedding plants, write or call the Professional Plant Growers Association, P.O. Box 27517, Lansing, MI 48909-0517; (517) 694-7700.

◀ Pansies are a time saver; they require little or no periodic pruning.

TOP-SELLING BEDDING PLANTS FOR 1992

Species	Spacing	Height	Light	Moisture	Colors
Sweet alyssum	10-12"	3-5"	partial shade to sun	avg. to dry	white, pinks/roses/peaches, purples, yellows
Begonia (fiborus)	7-9"	6-10"	partial shade to sun	average	white, pinks/roses/peaches lavenders, oranges, reds, bicolor silver
Dusty Miller	6-8"	8-10"	partial shade to sun	dry	white, pinks/roses/peaches
Geraniums	10-12"	10-15"	sun	moist	lavenders, oranges, reds, yellows, bicolor
Impatiens	8-10"	6-18"	partial shade to sun	moist	white, pinks/roses/peaches, lavenders, oranges, reds, bicolor
Impatiens	10-12"	10-18"		moist	white, pinks/roses/peaches, oranges, reds, bicolor
French marigolds	3-6"	5-10"	sun	average	yellows, golds, oranges, bicolor
Pansies	6-8"	4-8"	partial shade to sun	moist	white, pinks/roses/peaches, purples, oranges, yellows, blues, browns
Petunias	10-12"	6-12"	sun	avg. to dry	white, pinks/roses/peaches, lavenders, reds, purples, yellows, bicolor
Salvia	6-8"	12-24"	partial shade to sun	avg. to moist	white, pinks/roses/peaches, reds/burgundy, purples, oranges
Tomato	12-15"	24-72"	sun	average	(fruit), reds/burgundy, oranges, yellows
Vinca	6-8"	12-14"	partial shade to sun	any	white, pinks/roses/peaches, bicolor

Source: Professional Plant Growers Assn.

COLORFUL LANDSCAPE PERENNIALS

Variety	Height	Spacing	Comments	Colors
Pentas	10-36"	20"	Pest resistant, good color to soften a group planting. Will survive freeze if cut back beforehand. Heavy feeder, likes water, low maintenance. Year-round color without replant.	white, pinks, roses, mixes, lavender
Melampodium	6-12"	15"	Drought tolerant, sheerable, low fertilizer, low maintenance, upright. Good accent color. Lasts 5 months.	yellow
Dwarf hibiscus	8-15"	24"	Low, compact plant. Likes water until established. Low maintenance. Pest: whitefly.	reds, yellows
Crossandra	8-15"	15"	Heavy feeder. Drought resistant after established. Survives freeze if covered. Low maintenance, uniform height.	oranges, yellows
Lantana	10-24"	24"	Very low maintenance, low fertility, drought tolerant, sheerable.	creams
Verbena 'Polaris'	10-36"	15"	Drought tolerant, responds to sheering, heavy feeder. Pest: whitefly.	lavenders
Salvia 'Uglinosa'	15-36"		Good perennial. Drought tolerant. Responds to sheering. Heavy feeder.	blues

Source: Post Properties, Atlanta, Ga.

TREES/FALL COLOR

Common name	Latin name	Colors
Japanese maple	<i>Acer palmatum</i>	reddish, from orange to purplish
Kousa dogwood	<i>Cornus kousa</i>	" " " "
Sweetgum	<i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>	" " " "
Sassafras	<i>Sassafras albidum</i>	" " " "
Viburnums	<i>Viburnum spp.</i>	" " " "
Norway maple	<i>Acer platanoides</i>	yellows and golds
Beeches	<i>Fagus spp.</i>	" " " "
Tulip tree	<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>	" " " "
Star magnolia	<i>Magnolia stellata</i>	" " " "
Shrubs, vines		
Glossy abelia	<i>Abelia x grandiflora</i>	reddish, from orange to purplish
Chokeberries	<i>Aronia spp.</i>	" " " "
Cotoneaster	<i>Cottoneaster spp.</i>	" " " "
Bayberry	<i>Myrica pensylvanica</i>	" " " "
Virginia creeper	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	" " " "
Witchhazels	<i>Hamamelis spp.</i>	yellows and golds
St. Johnsworts	<i>Hypericum spp.</i>	" " " "
Spicebushes	<i>Lindera spp.</i>	" " " "

Source: Jo Mercer, Univ. of Delaware extension