



Long-term LANDSCAPING

Breeders are focusing on introducing new foliage selections in hundreds of colors and textures.

HOMEOWNERS WANT COLORFUL PERENNIALS, SHRUBS, AND ORNAMENTALS THAT WILL PROVIDE INTEREST FOR YEARS TO COME.

BY LESLIE KIRK AND DON EBERLY

THE DEMAND FOR professional landscape installations continues to shift as more homeowners and commercial property owners look to purchase long-term investments in addition to seasonal color with annuals. In order to adapt to this changing market and keep profits steady, professional landscapers and designers are looking to colorful perennials and shrubs to meet this need.

Anticipating this shift, growers have placed a strong focus on introducing blooming and foliage perennials that provide color and combination options more like annuals, with hardy characteristics.

Lasting benefits

Quality perennials, shrubs and ornamental grasses offer long-term value. Once these plants are established, they provide better resistance to wind, rain and drought, and can extend the display period. However, designing a successful perennial landscape involves longer planning and a better understanding of what clients are hoping to gain from the installation.

"No other group of plants can return the rewards of long life, re-bloom and seasonal interest," says Dan Heims, president of Terra

Nova Nurseries, Portland, OR. "When starting a plan, spend some time in research. Ask yourself, 'What level maintenance do these plants require?' and 'How long does this plant bloom?'"

When installing perennials, it is essential for landscapers to pair plants with similar nutrient and water needs to maximize resources and allow more flexibility of space. As with trees and large shrubs, landscapers should research the mature size and spread of each perennial they choose. This will help ensure the design remains cohesive and successful after several years.

"Use selections that offer the longest possible period of interest, color, fragrance, movement and texture," says David Wilson, marketing director for Overdeveest Nurseries and Garden Splendor, a line of perennials for the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions.

Both Heims and Wilson recommend multi-use perennials that provide both functionality and beauty. For example, some of the newest selections of dianthus, ajuga, echinacea, and sedums offer designers hardy, colorful options with improved heat and humidity resistance.

As consumers look for ways to stretch a budget, four-season landscapes that transition from year to year become an important selling point. Most clients also hope for installations that are low-maintenance and sustainable.

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While there may be more up-front cost for superior perennials, landscapers have found that the promise of a longer-lasting installation allows them to sell to customers. An installation with long-term success can also often lead to higher customer satisfaction, and thus a long-term relationship with larger potential for future sales.

"Use premium quality, market-ready perennials to create instant color and effect for the customer," says Wilson. "Getting off to a good start with high-quality plants may cost a little more, but this will be offset by the customer's reaction at the job completion and is likely to generate far more future referrals."

One trend Heims recently uncovered is that more homeowners are finding satisfaction in seeing a landscape grow to full maturity and remain successful. Landscape designers can find ways to lower initial costs by researching whether large plugs or quarts can be used in lieu of gallons, suggests Heims. "With irrigation, it's quite easy to grow plants to maturity quickly."

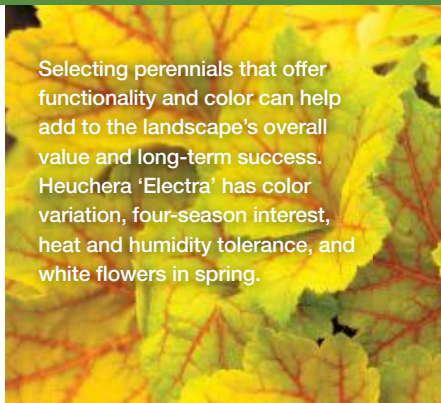
Other trendy ways to incorporate perennials include sustainable, eco-friendly designs, vertical gardening, and edible gardens with perennials as the season anchor.

Foliage Effect

In the past year, foliage gardens have become one of the most popular trends among homeowners, allowing landscapers to explore new plant material and stretch creatively into a new mode of design.

While a broad range of colors and textures in foliage perennials, shrubs and grasses have not always been available, breeders have spent a great deal of time cultivating new varieties that provide designers with combination options similar to annuals and blooming perennials.

"In my 20 years of design, maintenance and construction, I have found customers want color," says Heims. "I only dreamed of the palette of foliage



Selecting perennials that offer functionality and color can help add to the landscape's overall value and long-term success. Heuchera 'Electra' has color variation, four-season interest, heat and humidity tolerance, and white flowers in spring.



Combining shrubs, grasses and perennials in variations of one color, such as green, can act as a baseline for a single bold color to create an instant focal point.

plants that is available today. Many plants like Heuchera have such bright foliage, that they substitute for flowers, have seasonal color changes, and offer low-maintenance."

Foliage is all about leaf shapes, vein colors and outlines, textures and flow. Combinations are often subtle and focus on creating a mood, drawing the eye forward, and creating dimension in the space. For long-term foliage designs, keep in mind that it is important to use stockier, compact varieties, as these do not need staking and tying, and only require minimal maintenance and upkeep, says Wilson.

Because common foliage colors include variations of blues, greens and deep reds, a soothing design concept is often used by landscape designers. To achieve

Colorful blooming perennials (top) can be used in areas such as containers, garden beds and borders, raised beds, and cutting gardens.

this delicate ambiance, it is best to use strong textural contrasts to insight supplemental interest instead of bright colors. A mix of matte and velvet-like foliage may be best for this style, with combinations of smooth and serrated edges.

Begonias, lamb's ears and thymes are also excellent options for providing textures, as many of these come with fuzzy leaves. Colors such as silver, auburn, russet and deep green in foliage landscapes will also add sense of design diversity without over-complicating the design.

By choosing light colors such as yellows, chartreuse, bright reds and greens, a foliage garden will take on a more vibrant energy. When trying to make an impact, pair several bright- and true-green foliage varieties of different textures in an area with one or two unusual foliage colors. Complementing a heavy green palette with plants of crimson or wine will become an instant focal point. 🌿

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