

Ornamental OPPORTUNITIES

CONSUMERS ARE LOOKING AT ORNAMENTALS IN A NEW LIGHT. BY JAMIE J. GOOCH

YOUR CLIENTS MAY not know the difference between herbaceous perennials and woody ornamentals, but they know what they want. Creating educated landscape customers is a worthy goal, but don't forget to listen and learn from them as well.

"Landscapers shouldn't be lumping everything into plant categories, like trees, shrubs and perennials," says Debbie Lonnee, planning and administration manager at Bailey Nurseries Inc., Newport, MN. Bailey is one of the largest wholesale nurseries in the country. "They are all plants and can work in harmony. So many times we try to lump everything into a neat category, but the lines are becoming blurred. Shrubs are being used as annuals. Hey, whatever makes the customer happy!"

Craving color

This year, color is making the customer happy. And it doesn't matter if that color comes from blooms or foliage. Landscapers have the opportunity to weave ornamental trees and



Landscapers looking for something different in large-scale groundcover shrubs could move away from *Diervilla lonicera* to the new *Diervilla Cool Splash*, introduced by the Landscape Plant Development Center.

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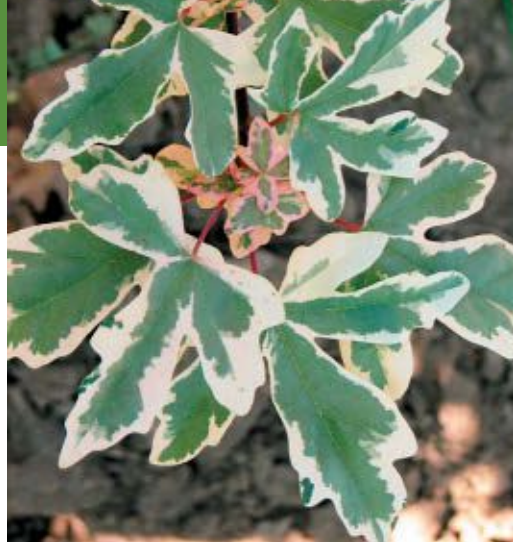
shrubs with distinctive shapes and foliage colors into the landscape.

Year-round color and interest from spring blooms, fall color and winter bark should all be taken into account when satisfying your customers' requests for color. Many consumers have also become enamored with variegated leaves. Clumps of green are becoming out of vogue, says Lonnee.

Edibles remain popular

Some of that color may even be good enough to eat.

According to The Garden Writers Association Foundation's (GWAFF) Late Spring Gardening Trends Research Report for the 2010 gardening season, more consumers are planning on adding a vegetable garden or herb garden. This



Top Variegated foliage, like this on *Acer campestre* Carnival, adds interest without blooms.

Bottom Landscapers can find improvements in new *Hydrangea*, from the reblooming *Endless Summer*, to the new types of *Hydrangea paniculata*, including more dwarf forms and improved flowers.

continues the edible landscape trend identified in last year's report that showed more than 41 million U.S. households (38%) grew a vegetable garden in 2009, more than 19.5 million households (18%) grew an herb garden and 16.5 million households (15%) grew fruits.

"Fruits in general have been a very strong category for us, whether it is a fruit tree such as apple, pear or plum, or any type of small fruit, from blueberry to currants, gooseberries and raspberries," Lonnee says. "We can't keep enough rhubarb in stock."

When planting edible plants, make sure the client is aware of the mainte-

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Small berries, whether on strictly ornamental plants or on edibles, add splashes of color to the landscape.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

No one can accurately predict what the economy will be like in the years to come, but a little soothsaying shows this might be a good time to profit from trees and shrubs.

Woody plants are readily available this season. There may even be an oversupply of them. However, it's likely that growers may cut back on production during the recent economic downturn. Because of the relatively long turn around time between planting and installation of trees and shrubs, supplies could be more limited even if the market picks up in the near future. If so, low supply and high demand could lead to price increases.

Volatility is not something growers enjoy. Many are willing to work with landscapers to custom grow plants for them, which can be a lifesaver on long-term projects.

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 nance that comes with many fruiting trees and shrubs. Many drop their fruit. However, there are ornamentals that don't leave a big mess, such as flowering crab apples, or produce small berries that are taken up by birds — often before ever hitting the ground.


Big ideas for small spaces

Designing a small landscape space? Don't rule out ornamentals. There are plenty of dwarf trees and shrubs from which to choose.

"We love the new Rocket series of barberries from PlantHaven," says Lonnee. "In the upper Midwest, people are looking for a substitute from the banned columnar buckthorn, and anything columnar and small fits the bill."

New shrubs and trees bred to fit small spaces can help landscape professionals

do a lot with a little space. Plant breeders have also made great strides in drought tolerance and disease resistance.

"Get to know your supplier's salespeople, and keep up on new plant trends," says Lonnee. "So many suppliers have open houses and tours and can show you what is in production." 

Gooch is a freelance writer based in Northeast Ohio. Contact him at jamie@goochandgooch.com.

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THE STATE OF *color*

Contractors learn about new varieties during Ball Horticulture's Landscape Day.

CONTRACTORS BELIEVE the market for annuals might wither like, well, a drought-stricken annual in the heat of the noonday sun.

According to a survey conducted by Ball Horticulture, 75% of landscape contractors say the number of color change-outs will stay the same or decrease over the next three years. At the same time, 96% expect their expenditures for perennials will stay the same or increase during the same period.

"This year has been flat-line stable for us," said Ed Mrozinski, a buyer for Acres Landscape, Wauconda, IL. Mrozinski was part of a panel of growers and contractors at Ball Landscape Day, held last month at Ball's headquarters in West Chicago, IL. Ball released its 2010 Landscape Contractor Survey at the event.

CONTRACTORS EXPECT THE PERENNIAL PLANT MARKET TO GROW WHILE ANNUALS MARKET TAKES A DIP. BUT NO MATTER WHAT THEY'RE LOOKING FOR, GROWERS CAN BE A CONTRACTOR'S BEST FRIEND.

BY DANIEL G. JACOBS

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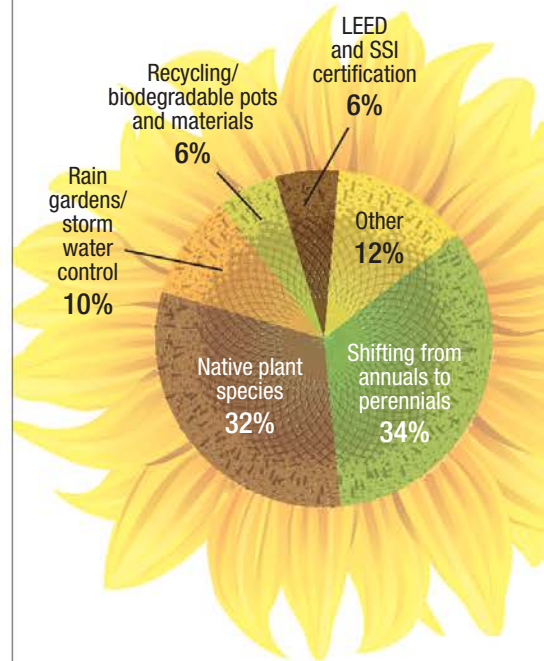
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> SURVEY

Which ONE of the following areas pertaining to landscape sustainability are your clients asking you about the MOST?



Notable trends

When asked which area pertaining to landscape sustainability clients are asking about most, nearly 34% responded “shifting from annuals to perennials.” The second most common response was “native plant species” at 32%.

Fewer annuals mean fewer color change-outs, which could have an impact on the bottom line.

“I like annuals,” said Bruce Hellerick, senior horticulturist for Brickman. “I’m very nervous for the industry right now.”

Whether it’s annuals or perennials, when contractors are looking for new varieties, the most popular source of information is to speak with the local grower. And nearly nine in 10 contractors (88%) are willing to trial those new varieties on customer jobsites. Just over half of contractors (51%) want growers to trial samples at the grower’s production facility. 🌱

Results based on Ball Horticulture survey with responses from 376 U.S. landscape contractors, 29% commercial and 46% residential, primarily maintenance (49%) and design/build (29%).

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Snapless snapdragon

Twinny Peach from **Hem Genetics** is a double, or butterfly, flower form that does not have jaws or joints. With distinct, soft shades of peach, yellow and light orange, the heat-tolerant plant rewards a full sun garden with abundant flower spikes. Plants will continue to flower all season with little garden care, according to the company. HemGenetics.com



Love at first blush

As the first of the michelia hybrids by New Zealand breeder Mark Jury to be released in the U.S., **Tesselaar's** Fairy Magnolia Blush delivers lilac-pink, lightly fragrant flowers, preceded by velvet-textured, russet-colored buds and accompanied by evergreen foliage — resembling a camellia without the gloss. The upright, compact, bushy shrub reaches 8 ft. high by 6 ft. wide, and is hardy in Zones 7b through 10. It blooms in late winter to early spring when sited in full sun to partial shade. Tesselaar.com

Fabulous phlox

Phlox Early Start is a series of new hybrids bred in Holland and offered as liners from **Pacific Plug and Liner**. Early Starts are most notable for their ability to flower four to six weeks earlier than traditional paniculata type phlox, according to the company. Currently available in three colors — pink, light pink (pictured) and velvet — it offers a nicely compact plant with flowers that will reach 8 to 12 in. while in the container. The appearance of Early Starts is similar to other paniculata phlox, but with smaller and more abundant blooms. The fragrant plants are densely branched and will put on an impressive show of color from April to July. PPandL.net



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Ball's award-winning, first year-flowering perennial Gaillardia, Mesa Yellow, flowers early and fills landscapes quickly. It maintains a controlled height of 16 to 18 in. without "flopping" over. Drought tolerant once established, Mesa Yellow shows intense, non-fading color all season on upright, well-branched plants.

BallLandscape.com



Early-season color splash

Monrovia's Sun Parasol Mandevillas are hybrids that have been available in North America for just a few years. Sun Parasols are valued for their intense flower color and glossy foliage. They are floriferous and will bloom with shorter daylight hours, so clients can enjoy the flowers as early as February, depending on variety. Colors include Giant Crimson, Giant Pink and Stars and Stripes. Monrovia.com

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Orange intensity

The fade-resistant, double blooms of Syngenta Flowers' Moonsong Deep Orange hybrid African marigold make others look more golden than orange. The flower size ranges from 2.5 to 3.5 in. Plants will flower in about 70 days under short days or 84 days under long-day growing conditions. The vigorous, stress-tolerant plants will reach 12 to 15 in. tall. Over the summer, the old blooms will be covered with green foliage, which keeps the plants looking fresh throughout the season. Syngenta-Flowers.com