

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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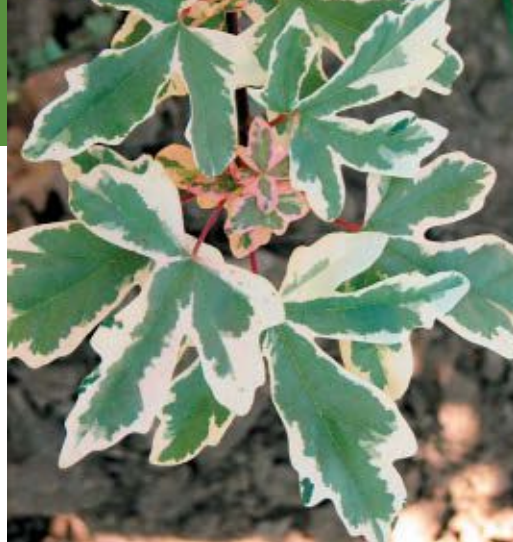
shrubs with distinctive shapes and foliage colors into the landscape.

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." 

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