

Catering to clients

A company finds container gardening to be full of possibilities.

CONTAINER GARDENING HAS proven to be a successful add-on service for Christensen Landscape Services, LLC in Northford, CT. In fact, container gardening has brought to light some additional opportunities, such as container storage and seasonal plant displays, in which the company can continue to drive revenue in the off-season. With all of the service possibilities container gardening brings to the table, the company has classified it as an add-on

service for both the design/build and maintenance divisions. But to make it successful, it requires some personal customization for the client.

"It definitely takes a little bit of catering to each individual client, as everybody has different tastes," says Donna Christensen, co-owner and designer. "You can't just say you're going to do a certain container design for every client.


Everyone likes different pots, different flowers and different color schemes, so it's not a quick service."

Since she started offering the service, Christensen says that the possibilities it has presented have continued to grow. She can have her garden crews charge to maintain the container gardens for those clients who don't want to do it themselves. That would include cleaning up, cutting back and shaping the plantings, along with regular maintenance such as watering if they don't have a drip irrigation system in place.

Christensen has also found a niche in offering tropical designs for clients.

"We have done some interesting things, such as offering palm trees that we bring in for the client and help maintain," she says. "We have also done a variety of tropicals. We can then store those in our greenhouses in the off-season. When it's time, we'll get them set up again on the client's property."

She notes that the tropical service has



Christensen Landscape Services has benefited from selling containers, tropical plants and other add-ons.

been a year-round opportunity because she's able to bill for storage and maintenance in the off-season.

NEW SEASON, NEW DESIGNS

Each new season poses an opportunity to potentially sell a new container garden design, Christensen says.

"In the early spring, we may suggest pansies and tulips, and as the season goes along, we'll ask about switching them out for some annuals," she explains. "In the fall, we can do mums, cabbage, kale and grasses, and then in the winter it's evergreen and holly berries. We have a number of clients that want all four seasonal presentations, so it's a great source of steady income."

Christensen has even found a nice little upsell opportunity in the actual container itself. Some clients may already have their own pots, but she's found that some clients like her to order them.

"That's another great sell," she says. "I may find a really interesting pot and be able to sell it to the client along with the plantings and service."

Christensen has been able to market this service through presentation. Neighbors of clients see the beautifully designed pots and inquire about them. Christensen says she's also found a great opportunity through displaying her container presentations at a local inn. She provides the property with some container gardening, and in exchange the inn lets her put her company name on all the pots.

"The innkeeper has a holiday tour that goes through the inn, where guests look at all the decorating," says Christensen. "That's been a wonderful opportunity for us to get this service out there.... We provide them with beautifully decorated pots and they let us market ourselves. It's a win-win."

The author is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: Christensen Landscape Services LLC

HEADQUARTERS: Northford, CT

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 50

ADD-ON: Container gardening

WHY: It provides a variety of billable services that the crew can add while they're already on the property doing other tasks. It also keeps the company in regular touch with clients.

OVERALL SERVICE BREAKDOWN: 50/50 maintenance and design/build

CLIENTELE: 90% residential; 10% condominiums and commercial properties

