



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

# Long-term LANDSCAPING

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

BY LESLIE KIRK AND DON EBERLY

**T**HE 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."

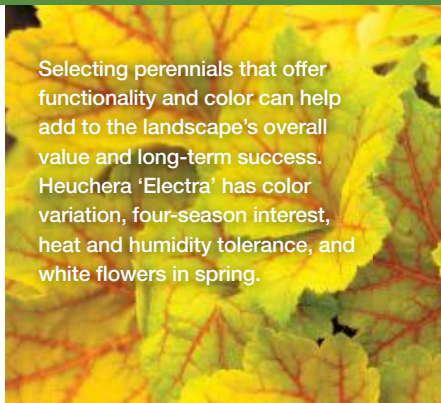
Other trendy ways to incorporate perennials include sustainable, eco-friendly designs, vertical gardening, and edible gardens with perennials as the season anchor.

### 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. 🌿

Leslie Kirk is a public relations manager/writer and Don Eberly is president/CEO at Eberly & Collard Public Relations, [www.eberlycollardpr.com](http://www.eberlycollardpr.com).



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### Perennial Plant Association

Blue false indigo (*Baptisia australis*) is the **Perennial Plant Association's 2010** Perennial Plant of the Year. It grows 3 to 4

ft. tall and 3 to 4 ft. wide in an upright habit. It grows across a wide range of zones and is one of the most adaptable native species. Newly emerging shoots produce violet-blue, lupine-like flowers in erect 10- to 12-in. racemes atop flower stems, extending well above the foliage mound of clover-like, trifoliolate, bluish-green leaves. The spring flowers are present for three to four weeks. The flowers give way to inflated seed pods, which turn to an ornamental charcoal black when ripe. [PerennialPlant.org](http://PerennialPlant.org)



### In Coleus we trust

**Ball Horticultural Co.**'s low-maintenance Trusty Rusty *Coleus* shines everywhere it's planted, and its large copper leaves are outlined in golden yellow. It is a vigorous and versatile plant and superior performer. Pairing with complementary varieties adds height, texture and contrast to combination plantings in both sun and shade. A free Landscape Resource CD about this and other Ball plants is available online at Ball's Web site. [BallLandscape.com](http://BallLandscape.com)

### Delicious 'dragons

New Aromas Intermediate Snapdragons were bred by **Goldsmith Seeds** for spring sales. Because they're very receptive to plant growth regulators, they're also cost-efficient. In the garden, the fragrant, well-branched plants produce numerous strong stems that resist lodging. They are available in seven colors (including French Vanilla, pictured) and a mixture. The upright plants reach 24 to 30 in. tall and spread 12 to 14 in. They bloom in spring and summer in relatively cool-weather areas, and in winter and spring in warm winter, hot summer areas. [GoldsmithSeeds.com](http://GoldsmithSeeds.com)



### Make a splash

The vigorous, variegated *Acanthus* Whitewater PPAF PVR from **Terra Nova** has striking, bold leaves with white margins and "splashing." It makes a large clump with 4- to 5-ft.-tall ornamental flower stalks of pink and cream in summer. This was bred with *A. Summer Beauty* for vigor, more hardiness, and heat and humidity tolerance. It is tolerant of most soils, but prefers the soil to be deep, fertile, moist and well-drained. [TerraNovaNurseries.com](http://TerraNovaNurseries.com)



### Beauty for a cause

Not only is Invincibelle Spirit the Holy Grail of the first pink mop-head *Hydrangea arborescens*, but it is also dedicated to help raise money for breast cancer research. Proven Winners is dedicated to raise at least \$1 million, with \$1 donated to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation for each Invincibelle Spirit sold. This new "Annabelle" **Proven Winners ColorChoice** is particularly special because its flowers emerge a dark, hot pink color and mature to a rich clear pink. As a continuous bloomer, it produces new mop-head flowers from early summer until frost for a grand and beautiful seasonal display. [ProvenWinners.com](http://ProvenWinners.com)



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## A goodbye letter

*Dear Grandma,*

I talked to Mom a little while ago. She wants me to give you permission to let go. The hospice nurse made the suggestion. You haven't had anything to eat or drink in a few days, so they've placed you in "crisis care" — which means they are making you as comfortable as possible.

Each of your six grandchildren was asked to call and let you know everything will be OK, that we'll be there to take care of our mothers, your three daughters. You don't need to worry about them anymore. We'll be there to take care of them and one another. That's one of the things you showed us all over the years: the importance of family. You were there for the births of your grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and have helped guide each of us from the very day he (or she) entered this world.

I remember when our son Josh was born. You and Mom arrived at the house, and you waited impatiently while Marci was upstairs nursing him. When Marci came down, you swept Josh out of his mother's arms and just stared at him, completely ignoring Marci. We laugh about it now, how absorbed you were in that skinny little baby. That skinny little kid is going to college next year.

It's ironic. At the beginning and end of our lives, we need so much care. We can do so little for ourselves. I'm happy your daughters, my mom and two aunts, all followed you to Florida. You were able to spend so many good years together. I liked hearing stories about "Girls' Night Out" because I knew that meant you were all able to spend time together. And they're there with you, now.



(left to right) My Aunt Aline, Grandmother Sarah, Aunt Sharon, and Mother Gloria.

That gives me hope. As Josh leaves next year and his sister Sammie a few years after that, these are the last few months we'll all be under the same roof as a family. I'm not ready for that. But it gives me hope that some day, despite their grand plans and adventures — if we have been able to instill the sense of family values you passed on to your daughters, who in turn handed them to us — then perhaps we'll all spend more than the occasional holiday together.

And I suppose that was your greatest gift. I don't know how many times my mother told me (and you probably told her), "Wait until you have children of your own. Then you'll understand." ... Now, I do.

After several years as a parent, including a couple of stints as a stay-at-home dad, I tried to ask Mom how I could ever repay her for the hardship and pain (and hopefully a lot of joy, too) of raising me. She said, in essence, do a good job raising your children. That validates what she did to raise hers.

I'm trying. My children are unfinished, and for that matter, so am I. But I think they're on the right path. I have Mom to thank for that, and of course you.

Others might stake their legacies on fame or wealth. But for me, the simple values you instilled in your family are the most valuable gifts you've ever shared. So, it's OK to let go. Let your suffering end. We're here to take care of each other.

Love,  
Danny

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

*The author's grandmother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer a few months ago. She was put on hospice care in February and passed away less than an hour after this article was completed.*

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# ACUTABOVE

GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY DAN JACOBS



Mission Landscape's David DuBois views obstacles as opportunities.

Over the past 40 years, Mission Landscape Cos. has become one of the largest landscape companies in the industry. Since its inception, the enterprise has added services and now comprises seven separate entities covering all aspects of the Green Industry. Five years ago, the Irvine, CA-based enterprise began operating as an employee stock ownership plan. President and CEO **David DuBois** discusses how his company remains a maintenance leader.

## INSIDE INFO

**Company:** Mission Landscape Cos.

**Headquarters:** Irvine, CA

**Year founded:** 1970

**Employees:** 500+

**Annual revenue:** \$26 million

**Web site:** MissionLandscape.com

**Key to being a Maintenance Leader:** Staying on top of the company's vision, cash and culture, and always building our brand.

colleagues share their comments on how things "used to be" and how much has changed. This reinforces my belief that we need to continue to focus on changes in management, as change will only become faster and more furious in the future. There will be some good companies in our industry that will disappear as a result of being caught off guard and not able to react quickly enough to some of these changes.

## TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **Property partners.** There are many challenges right now that can all be looked at as opportunities, such as commercial properties experiencing higher vacancies. Meeting with clients to assist with leasing needs of their properties not only has reinforced and strengthened our relationships, but has allowed us to propose upgrades that help make the site more appealing while reducing the owners' costs. Smart property owners know doing the right thing for their clients and sites will increase their occupancy rates and reputations, while adding value to their properties.

» **Going green.** The growing demands for all things green and sustainable—from water management, rain harvesting, erosion control, organic soil amendments and pest control, as well as recycling and integrated plant health care—can lead to additional business for the maintenance industry.

» **Tech advantage.** Technology with product, customer relationship management and sales forecasting, communications and accounting—and even hybrid lawn mowers—all have come so far to help the landscape maintenance industry better serve our clients' needs.

## TOP TRENDS

» **Can you hear us now?** We are increasing in the type and frequency of communications. Because clients have reduced staff levels and support and are wearing more hats today, it's often more difficult to reach them. Investing in the appropriate communications and reporting technology—and in the training to aid our staff—has provided very positive feedback from our clients, proving us to be a timely and informative resource for them.

» **Liquid gold.** Water management continues to grow in interest, as a result of regulation, price increases and media attention to California's escalating water shortage. It ranges from installing smart controllers and low-precipitation nozzles to utilizing drip systems with clients wanting to understand their overall impact and value. Conducting thorough irrigation audits with detailed solutions that help save money and increase returns on investments also have become very popular.

» **More mulch.** Renovating landscape with indigenous and drought-tolerant plants, and removing ground covers and replacing them with topper mulch, are both becoming commonplace. Especially in older, mature landscapes, the mulch really helps enhance property appearance—providing a welcomed facelift and saving water along the way.

## TOP OBSTACLES

» **The speed of change.** Keeping up with the volume and speed of change in governmental regulations to finance and human resources is the first obstacle. Adapting our business, and then the rate at which we need to communicate changes to our clients for implementation, are other key challenges. Many industry

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# DON'T BE CAUGHT OFF GUARD BY cultural issues

Your Hispanic employees' attitudes and approaches to work can create some on-the-job challenges. BY BARBARA MULHERN

PICTURE YOURSELF IN this situation: You have an all-Hispanic or nearly all-Hispanic crew. One of the crewmembers isn't pulling his weight. But you don't find out about it until you personally visit one of his job sites — or, you don't find out about it at all.

"We'll put these guys (Hispanic workers) together on crews," says Maria Anaya, a bilingual Latina woman who serves as a liaison between Spanish-speaking workers and management at Kujawa Enterprises Inc. (KEI) in Oak Creek, WI.

"They'll never come to us and say: 'He's not doing what he needs to be doing,'" Anaya says. "Instead, another guy will pick up the slack. It's almost a code of honor among the crews. We have to go out and watch them to see who's working and who isn't."

Understanding your Hispanic workers' cultures not only will improve relationships; it also makes good business sense.

## Potential barriers

Here are some additional cultural issues you may come across that can be barriers to effective communication and/or safe work practices:

➤ **Risk-taking.** Risk-taking is viewed as the norm in certain countries such as Mexico, particularly among young Hispanic males. In one incident in California, a 19-year-old Mexican native who had been doing landscaping

*continued on page 62*



When training your Hispanic workers, closely watch their facial expressions to see if they really understand. Then have them repeat back to you what they just learned.