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This combination shows contrasting foliage texture, simultaneous blooming, and perennial foliage cover.

5 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL COMBOS

Here are some spring garden tips from the Cornell team in Ithaca, NY, and the Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center of Danby, VT:

1. Plant bulbs that are likely to perennialize well in your area. Some combo plantings are more successful than others. Sometimes the

perennials come back, but the bulb flowers don't. Most often, this occurs when the wrong bulbs are chosen for local climate or growing conditions. Other times, you may choose the right bulb type but a less durable variety.

2. Consider each plant's seasonal growth habits. What looks good in the mind's eye

may not look as good in the early spring soil. This can happen when choosing companions based on their mature description without considering their springtime rate of growth and look at that time. In spring, different plants emerge and fill out in different ways, often featuring different coloring than later in the growing season. The goal of companion combos is to select perennials and bulbs that emerge together to work well in spring and early summer as partners. The Cornell project addresses this very subject.

3. Consider mature plant size. Unlike annuals, which normally grow large and flourish in a single season before dying away, perennials may take several seasons to gain maturity. If, for example, you are planning for a perennial to grow to a certain size in relation to your bulb planting, be sure to calculate when the perennial will reach that size. It may be necessary to plan for several bulb companions for your perennials over initial seasons, changing bulb choices as the perennials mature. Rather than a drawback, consider these as opportunities to play with bulbs as seasonal accessorizing.

4. Plant just enough bulbs. This might be considered the "Goldilocks" tip. Plant too few bulbs, and the look is sparse. Plant too many, and face overcrowding. Refer to bulb packaging, catalogs or websites for suggested spacing.

5. Allow for perennial spread. Different perennials have different growth habits. Some are aggressive growers with a tendency to spread. Others are late to leaf out and have a compact growth habit. For the aggressive spreaders, allow space for them to fill in. For more compact perennials, plant bulbs closer together. These considerations pay off when perennials' late spring growth successfully hides bulb die-back after bloom.

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King of the mountain

Initially released with the Novalis "Plants that Work" group in 2010, *Carex oshimensis* Everest is available in 2011 nationwide from **Tesselaar**. With its bright-white margins and architectural, linear foliage, the Japanese sedge can work as a container and patio plant or as a filler with bedding and specimen plants. It loves shade, and its low-growing, easily controlled, mounding shape softly edges any border or bed. Its ability to fill in an area while still behaving itself, also makes it useful as a groundcover. Tesselaar.com

Deep purple

Echinacea purpurea PowWow Wild Berry features vivid rose-purple, 3- to 4-in. flowers that retain color longer than other coneflowers. Hardy to Zone 3, **Ball's** first-year-flowering perennial has a basal branching habit, resulting in more flowers per plant. Reaching a height of 20 to 24 in. in the full-sun garden, it blooms continually without deadheading. It's an intermediate day-length flowering variety, with most rapid and uniform flowering at 14 hours. BallLandscape.com



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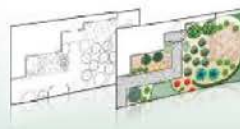
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Sweet potato cutie

Ipomoea Bright Ideas is bred by **Floranova**, and its plants are heat-tolerant and very compact. Distributed in the US by Oro Farms, the series' colors include black, lime and Rusty Red (pictured). Growing 6 in. tall to a spread of 12 in., it works well in combination planters and flowerbeds. OroFarms.com



Performance diva

In early spring, the leaves of *Abelia* Kaleidoscope emerge on bright-red stems with lime-green centers and bright-yellow edges. When summer arrives, the yellow matures to golden and the variegation does not burn or scorch, according to the company. In fall and winter, the foliage color deepens to shades of orange and fiery red. This mounded, tightly branched shrub stays under 3 ft. tall and about as wide. Reported by **PlantHaven** to be the longest-blooming of all the *Abelias*, by late spring Kaleidoscope is covered with soft pink buds that open to white blooms that keep coming well into autumn. AbeliaKaleidoscope.com

LM REPORTS

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

LAWN CARE: AERATORS



Grasshopper Co.

The power-take-off-driven AERATOR implement relieves compaction and aerates turf without prior irrigation, leaving no cores to clean up. Models are now available with 50% more tines to loosen soil without disrupting the surface. Oscillating, forged steel tines penetrate and fracture hard, dry soils without slicing or cutting, preserving and encouraging root development. Available in 40- and 60-in.

Turfco

The XT5 steerable, *reversible* aerator uses Turfco's patented steerable aerator technology with a new hydrostatic drive system. Operators can boost efficiency and reduce job time on heavily landscaped lawns and hard-to-reach areas. The tine-wheel design and hydrostatic drive make working on hills easier. The XT5 features EasyChange tines, which reduce changeover time. A removable tine cover provides fast, easy access for changes and cleaning. The unit features a low-profile design and rugged unibody steel frame. Instead of belts, the XT5 runs on drive chains covered and located outside of the frame for long-lasting, trouble-free operation. *TurfcoDirect.com*

Agri-Fab

SmartLink is an all-in-one lawn care system that links attachments to one master platform. The system accepts a snap-in plug aerator, tine dethatcher, TurfShark aerator and poly roller, eliminating separate trays for each product. The original line required users to purchase the master platform with a plug aerator. The two products are sold separately — providing a solution for users who want to take advantage of the system, but don't need the plug aerator attachment. *Agri-fab.com*



models, the unit provides effective aeration with minimal surface disruption, so turf is available for use immediately

after treatment. It's compatible with Grasshopper Model 620T and any 700 or 900 Series power units. *GrasshopperMower.com*

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Jacobsen

Featuring a 9-hp Briggs & Stratton Vanguard engine, the GA-24 is a self-propelled aerator that provides precise aeration and hole quality, which promotes faster turf healing. The unit's maneuverability allows for tight turns on undulated turf without causing undue damage. Four tine sizes are available, creating a 2x2-in. aeration pattern; optional quad tine holders create a 1x1-in. pattern. Features include centralized controls at the operator station, automatic parking brake and operator presence control. Jacobsen.com

SourceOne

From its fingertip speed control knob to its simplified, self-propelled hydrostatic drive system, the PL855 PRO HD hydrostatic drive aerator offers high productivity and low maintenance costs. Like all Plugr reciprocating aerators, heat-treated, high-tensile-strength tines are driven into even hard soils, with cam action engine power instead of bulky weights. It features sleek unibody construction, improved handle ergonomics, easy maintenance access and a built-in quick release receiver hitch for a StepSavr sully. SourceOneOPE.com



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Worx Yard Tools

Electric chainsaws in 14-, 16- and 18-in. bar lengths feature an easy-to-use, tool-free auto-tensioning system and chain replacement. A single, oversized, easy-grip knob secures the bar and tensions the chain. The saws' patented chain-tensioning system prevents overtightening and maintains proper tension during operation. The tensioning system helps extend bar and chain life while reducing the amount of time working. Each model — WG300 (14-in. bar, 14A, 3.0 hp, pictured), WG303 (16-in. bar, 14.5A, 3.5 hp) and WG304 (18-in. bar, 15A, 4 hp) — has class-leading hp ratings for each corresponding bar length. The saws weigh 10.8 lbs., 11 lbs. and 11.2 lbs., respectively. WorxYardTools.com



Stihl

The MS 362 chainsaw, which is engineered to save professional users time and money, delivers as much as 20% greater fuel efficiency and reduces emissions by as much as 70% compared to older models. It features a pre-separation air filtration system that allows for fewer filter changes and longer runtimes. The advanced anti-vibration system allows a user to keep working comfortably. Other standard features include a toolless fuel and oil cap with retainers, side-access chain tensioner and a decompression valve. StihlUSA.com

Husqvarna

The 576XP chainsaw features a redesigned cylinder and crankcase that, at 14.5 lbs. and 5.7 hp, is 0.5 lb. lighter than previous models and offers more horsepower. Like other models in Husqvarna's professional line of chainsaws, it features the X-TORQ engine that provides high power-to-weight ratio, 60% lower emissions and 20% lower fuel consumption. It also features Air Injection for longer air filter life and LowVib anti-vibration technology for improved ergonomics. Husqvarna.com



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LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



A big boom in business became too much to manage for Texas' Native Land Design.

WHEN THE ECONOMY was robust and business was booming in 2006/2007, Native Land Design went from a \$4 million business to a \$10 million one in just two years. "People may think, 'How could almost tripling your business hurt you?' and I thought that too," says Ben Collinsworth, CEO of the Cedar Park, TX-based business. "But it can. We have been taught that growth is good, profit is good, and if you're doing those things right, then everything else will take care of

itself. That is a fallacy in business. Growth can be good when you know what you are getting yourself into and when you develop a model to follow through on the needs of the business. Without a plan, the growth can spin you out of control."

And that's just what happened. As Collinsworth started taking on any and every job that came through the door, he began slipping on payments and wasn't staying on top of accounts. He felt like the company was spending all of its time trying to catch up with the impossibly fast pace they'd set instead of having a solid plan to follow.

"I was steering in the dark," he admits. "Clients were paying bills slower

than I was used to ... stretching payments past the 60 and 90 days. Even if we had \$700,000-plus dollars a month in revenue, that didn't mean we were collecting that in cash each month."

With payroll and taxes to pay, Collinsworth's vendors ended up being the ones to take the hit. "And as we slowly paid vendors, because our bank lines weren't large enough to handle the cash flow deficit, they started limiting our ability to buy," he says. "That put us in a crunch. If you can't pay for the cash flow deficit, you can't perform the work. Even though we were showing a profit, the cash wasn't available until it was received in the office."

Though things seemed to be spiraling out of control, Collinsworth made some wise decisions that not only saved his business but made it much more successful in the long run. First, he let go of his Dallas market — what he admits was an emotional decision losing some of the business he had built up. "I had to cut off a piece of the business to make it more manageable," he says. "If I hadn't made that decision, I'm not sure we'd be here. It allowed me to really concentrate on the other markets we had."

Getting involved with peer groups and soliciting feedback from more experienced business owners was the other decision that

helped turn Collinsworth's predicament around. "Business owners need to realize seeking advice isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength," he says. "The best landscape business owners I know surround themselves with the smartest people who give them hard feedback. Without those sounding boards, you are destined to make bad decisions from a lack of experience. Find a good base of professional people to bounce ideas off of and make sure you are heeding their warnings."

Collinsworth says there are many changes he would have made early on to prevent the company from growing quicker than he could manage. He would have solicited feedback from his CPA, hired a full-time controller and paid closer attention to his balance sheets. Most importantly, Collinsworth says he wouldn't have taken on as many jobs with the mindset that he'd figure things out as he went along.

"I would have had a more detailed and well-thought-out plan from the start," he says.

Today, Collinsworth takes things at a slower pace. "It can take some hard lumps in business to realize that conquering the world too quickly isn't worth the headache," he says. "That is something that we still practice to this day. Setting budgets for slower growth is now standard in our expectations."

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



Ben Collinsworth

COMPANY: Native Land Design
CEO: Ben Collinsworth
HEADQUARTERS: Cedar Park, TX
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