



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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Straight and tall

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

Golf's U.S. Open was in Pebble Beach, CA. **Bill Davids**, president of Clarence Davids & Co., and his team hopped on a plane and headed west. They didn't go to watch professionals play the famed golf shrine. Davids and his team were there to landscape the corporate hospitality area, the main entrance promenade and the merchandise pavilion. "The U.S. Open was in Chicago at Olympia Fields (Country Club) in 2003," Davids says. "We won the contract, and we've been doing it ever since."

LM recently spoke with the second-generation owner to discuss changes in maintenance.

TOP TRENDS

» **Environmental concerns.** We've seen a move to more natural landscapes. Instead of trying to mow everything, we're having some areas utilize more natural plantings or a lower mow turf mix. There seems to be a desire to be more environmental — using fewer chemicals and less water. We have a commitment to being good stewards of the land and to create natural sustaining environments. The goal of the new generation of landscapers is to use fewer chemicals, less water and become more natural.

» **New technology.** We use equipment to maximize our labor. An example is stand-on mowers. Any type of newer equipment that saves labor and is better for the environment (e.g. uses less fuel, etc.) — all those things are taken into account when we do our purchasing.

» **Equipment maintenance.** There is a return there. We utilize our equipment for several years. When equipment gets a certain number of hours, we are ready to trade it in. We have full-service mechanics, and we service all our own equipment. We keep our equipment a long time and keep it in good condition.

TOP OBSTACLES

» **The economy.** Lower budgets are caused by a poor economy. Even on the Gold Coast, in downtown Chicago, they're seeing the impact. If one or two \$1 million condos in a building are in foreclosure, that throws the whole budget off. The management

The Clarence Davids & Co. team.



INSIDE INFO

Company: Clarence Davids & Co.

Headquarters: Matteson, IL

Founded: 1951

Branches: 3

Employees: nearly 75 full-time (200 seasonal)

2009 revenue: \$18 million

LM Top 150 Ranking: No. 68

Key to being a maintenance leader: Communication with the client. Find out what their priorities are. Your priorities are going to be different than their highest priorities. Without that communication, you're going to be going one way, and they're thinking something else.

company has less money to run the building, and eventually it trickles down to landscaping. We're doing fewer services for less money. Bottom line, it affects our sales.

» **The government.** The biggest intrusion in Chicago is prevailing wage. The prevailing wage law for Illinois does not recognize landscaping as a profession, so they don't recognize our rates. They throw us in this category with highway workers, which is five times our current wage. The state has no money, but they continue with these outdated laws that are confusing and counterproductive. We've made a decision to no longer bid prevailing wage jobs.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **Cross-selling.** Design/build is still a strong sales tool. It gives the landscape maintenance

contractor a very creative way to add sales and benefit their maintenance clients. We can redesign certain parts of a client's property or redesign an old, tired landscape or an entryway. It gives us that creative edge over a pure maintenance contractor. Design sales are down, but it's imperative we continue to use it to benefit our clients.

» **H2O.** There is opportunity in how we need to capture rainwater. We need to begin designing and installing underground tanks for the storage and reuse of that water in the landscape. We continue to look at technology. I see that as key in years to come.

» **Innovation.** There are a lot of new plants out there that have been improved. Native plants that take less water, less maintenance — they look better longer in the season. We have the ability to redesign areas and take out the problem plants — the older plants that have too many diseases and require too much water and maintenance.

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Honesty always rings true

Remember what it was like to possess unbridled honesty? For many of us adults, it's been decades.

Unbridled honesty is what made "Liar, Liar" — the 1997 comedy in which Jim Carrey played an attorney who can't help but speak his mind and tell the truth at every turn — so appealing at the box office.

On a daily basis, I get a whiff of that pure-white honesty children seem to innately possess, thanks to our three children, our 25 nieces and nephews and my 10 grandchildren.

We adults could learn a lesson or two about rigorous honesty from these little ones. Complete honesty not only is the easy way; it's the only way.

Our day-to-day dealings and long-term relationships with co-workers, customers, the public and our families and friends, hinge on honesty. Fortunately, honesty is pretty straightforward: *Is it true or false?*

Having said that, in practicing honesty sometimes there's a golden mean — that perfect spot somewhere in-between a child's penchant to be brutally honest (where, in some cases, a taming of the tongue would be advisable) and that point to which many of us adults seem to have "progressed" — where too

much is muddled or buried for myriad "reasons" (also known as *rationalizations*).

Political correctness aside, children's penchant to freely speak their minds often yields refreshing, humorous "big picture" honesty:

› **It's All About Perspective** — A few years ago, Bridgid was cuddling with our ever-lovable son, Jamie, who happens to have Down syndrome. Holding Jamie, and worried about serious medical tests our precious angel was set to receive the next morning, Bridgid told him: "When I was student teaching in college, I worked with some beautiful children who had Down syndrome, and Dad and I said to each other way back then, 'Wouldn't it be fun to adopt a kid with Down's?' ... And then God gave us you years later." Jamie's eyes lit up. He grinned ear to ear and asked, "You mean I was your dream come true, Mom?"

› **Laughter: Medicine Without a Co-Pay** — Bridgid shared the above story with me that day, when I got home from work. After hearing the touching tale, I looked at Jamie and tried to humorously change the gravity of the conversation: "Let me get this straight. You were hugging and kissing *my* wife? What were you thinking?" Jamie's little body shook with laughter as he quipped, "That was *my* dream come true, Dad."

› **Lord of the Rings** — I recently attended a grade school reunion (St. Mark, Class of 1980), where my wife discovered I'd previously proposed to five other women. Luckily, I was in the first grade when I was handing out rings. I'll never forget my dad asking me about the five plastic companion rings I was wearing and then grinning impishly — and cautiously — as he looked at Mom and asked, "Why on Earth would anyone want five wives?"

Having five wives is like having five different stories. It's best to be married to one story — the truth — at work and at home. Absolute honesty is the goal; we claim progress, but seek perfection.

At a recent reunion, **my wife discovered I'd previously proposed to five other women.**





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