

Keep an Eye on Shrub Trends



By Mark Osgerby

These four characteristics can help you determine what might be flying off your shelves in 2017 and beyond.

As we move into this year's gardening season, it's important to be up on consumer trends to be prepared to meet the needs of your customers. As an international brand, Proven Winners ColorChoice Flowering Shrubs has a unique and insightful perspective on buying trends of consumers.

Through plant sales, an expansive advertising campaign reaching throughout North America and a robust social media presence, we are able to monitor buying habits of consumers and trends influencing their decisions.

Below are the latest trends we've identified that you'll want to pay attention to in 2017.

Embracing Nature

Every garden and landscape has certain obstacles such as too much shade, wet soil, deer browsing, dry soil, etc. After years of trying to work through these hurdles, many gardeners are opting to "go with the flow."

For instance, instead of putting out repellent to stop pesky deer, many are moving toward deer-resistant shrubs. Encourage your staff to suggest these deer-resistant varieties in your garden center: diervilla, viburnum and forsythia.

Another way gardeners have embraced nature is by creating environments for pollinators and birds by trading curated gardens for a more natural and relaxed approach to their gardens.

Most people think perennials when it comes to pollinators, but shrubs provide a perfect solution because they are long-blooming, hardy and offer multiple seasons of interest.

Direct your customers to these long-blooming varieties like buddleia, caryopteris and hydrangeas.

For your bird loving customers, suggest viburnum, sambucus and syringa.

Making the Cut

The term "locally grown" has sparked a revolution in the cut flower industry. Consumers are passing by flowers shipped from overseas and are instead looking for locally grown fresh flowers.

As a result, farmers markets have become a leading source of cut flowers and have seen a rise in popularity. Many are now looking to grow their own plants for cuttings to sell or for personal enjoyment.

Direct your customers to these easy-care productive flowering shrubs ideal for cuttings such as hydrangeas, chaenomeles, abelia and physocarpus.

Consumers looking for inspiration should consider the book, "Slow Flowers," by Debra Prinzing. It's an insightful resource for design tips, bouquet recipes and regionalized plant suggestions.

Mix and Match

Foodscaping has gained in popularity since the recession in 2009 when homeowners were looking



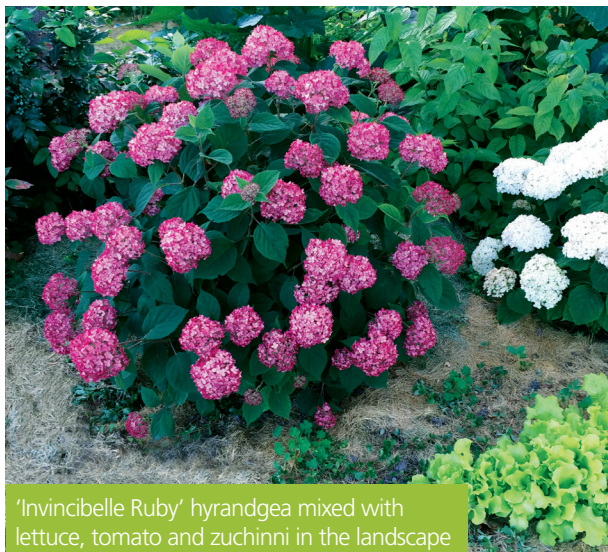
to cut costs and save money by growing their own food. Since then, gardeners have looked for new ways to maximize vegetable and fruit yields. One obvious solution is to grow more food-bearing plants in gardens and landscapes.

The trick for many has been balancing limited garden space between food-bearing varieties and garden favorites. Encourage your customers to try space-saving shrubs like compact hydrangeas, deutzias and landscape roses.

Many food-bearing plants also have ornamental appeal that blend nicely with flowering shrubs so gardeners and homeowners are now mixing them together in garden beds and landscape.

Strike a Pose

Striking forms and unique varieties started with succulents and now have moved into the garden. Gardeners and homeowners are adding in plants with unique forms that make a statement and stand out in the garden.



'Invincibelle Ruby' hydrangea mixed with lettuce, tomato and zucchini in the landscape



'Little Lime' hydrangea

New introductions such as 'Purple Pillar' Rose of Sharon hibiscus and 'Strait-Laced' Sambucus, both with a uniquely fastigiated habit, are prime examples of this growing trend and really make a statement.

Customers will be looking for varieties that fit into these new trends. Keep these ideas in mind as you build your inventory for the year, create your garden center displays and train staff for the upcoming season.

After all, aligning your merchandising strategy with consumer trends will generate more sales.

LGR

Mark Osgerby is with Proven Winners ColorChoice Flowering Shrubs as the marketing and public relations specialist at Spring Meadow Nursery Inc. He can be reached at mark@springmeadownursery.com.



'Strait-Laced' elderberry

READY FOR A COMPETITION?



Don't suffer from spring fever — cure it with this fun, friendly competition. Now in its fourth year, Shrub Madness is a bracket-style tournament based on the college basketball playoffs that happen every March, but with 64 Proven Winners ColorChoice Flowering Shrubs as competitors.

Pitted against one another in a series of match-ups, it's up to gardeners across North America to vote their favorites through to the next round at www.shrubmadness.com. In the end, one plant is crowned National Champion, where it enjoys bragging rights, heightened visibility and increased sales.

Last year, more than 82,000 votes were cast by over 2,600 gardeners during the course of the competition. Shrub Madness is one example of Proven Winners marketing dollars at work to bring your garden center more business.

Shrub Madness is fantastic market research. Find out first-hand what your customers respond to and what they'll be looking for when planting season begins. It's an inside look at what they want and need in their yards this season.

Also, Shrub Madness is a fast and fun staff training opportunity and easy way to learn the cultural needs and unique traits of each variety. It takes just a few minutes each day to run through the matchups and vote.

The contest was open for predication during the month of February, and on March 1, voting begins. Each weekday, matchups are posted with a photo of the plant, a link to their page on the Proven Winners website and a short description. A click of the button helps your favorite move to the next round. On March 31, voting closes and the new National Champion is named. Gardeners' votes will decide!

Have questions or want to chat about how you can make Shrub Madness work for your business? Contact Proven Winners ColorChoice Flowering Shrubs at shrubmadness@springmeadownursery.com.