

Scaling Down And Toning Up

Bright color and small stature are the most prominent trends with this season's trees and shrubs.

By Jen Hubert



Top: Make sure you have a variety of trees and shrubs at your store so you can cater to all of the latest trends your customers are looking for. **Bottom:** As people move onto smaller lots, they have less room for elaborate gardens. Plants like this dwarf Japanese barberry can add beauty to a garden while saving space. (Photo: Monrovia Growers)

If you have been stocking the same trees and shrubs for 5-10 years or more, you are probably missing out on sales. Recent breeding advancements and renewed customer interest have made the back lot, where most people relegate this category, a much larger profit center than it was even last year.

The new trees and shrubs are hard to miss.

With a combination of bright blooms, unique shapes and better marketing support, they bring to the stores vibrancy that consumers want in their homes. Growers say recent sales make it clear: If customers can't have a big plant, they want one that makes a bold statement.

The old favorites — magnolias, Japanese maples and camellias — will stick around, but the demand has increased for a plant that is a little more dynamic and a lot more accommodating.

Going Smaller

If people's houses aren't shrinking, the lots they are on are, said Tim Wood, product development manager for Spring Meadow Nursery, Inc., Grand Haven, Mich. They don't want to angle for space with a plant that looms too close to the house or pushes up against the windows.

"No one really wants a 12-ft. forsythia any longer," Wood said. And, fortunately, with a lot of the plant breeding that's done, there are three or four choices of dwarf forsythia that aren't going to get any bigger than your window in your house. So, you can put them around your deck or close to your house, and you're not going to be fighting it."

Katie Bloome, public relations coach for Monrovia Growers, Azusa, Calif., noticed customers' attraction to smaller varieties of old favorites. A dwarf Japanese maple can bring the same amount of beauty into a smaller space as the larger version. They can even provide the focus of a container garden. Now that space is so important, these compact gardens can maintain their look in a smaller area. ▶

MEET THE NEWEST MEMBER OF THE FAMILY



- **Pressurized filtration system provides mechanical, biological and UV Sterilization for clear healthy water. Designed to work with solids handling or solids blocking pumps and features patented Click-Fit Fast Couplings.**
- **Pressure-Flo Filters systems filter 330 to 1595 GPH (US) providing filtration for ponds up to 3200 Gallons (US).**
- **Simple maintenance, revolutionary backwash system allows filter pads to be cleaned using external handles, no need to open filter. Easy view indicator light signals when it is time to clean.**

- **Pressure-Flo Filters** systems filter 330 to 1585 GPH (US) providing filtration for ponds up to 3200 Gallons (US).

- **Simple maintenance, revolutionary backwash system allows filter pads to be cleaned using external handles, no need to open filter. Easy view indicator light signals when it is time to clean.**



**For more information call 1.800.724.2436
or log on to www.hagen.com**



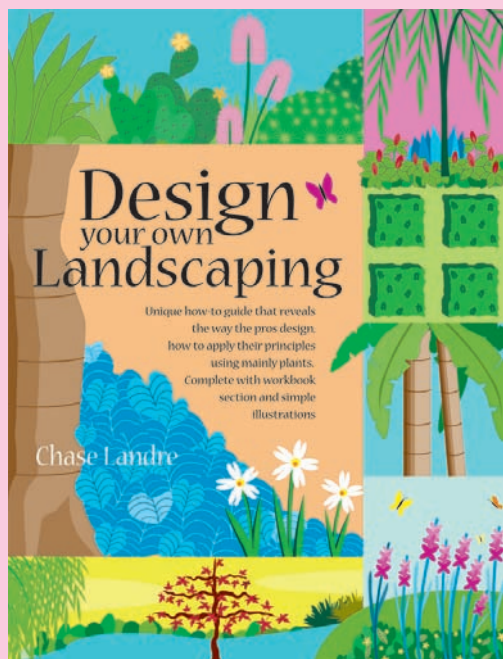
Laguna Pressure-Flo High Performance Pressurized Pond Filter System with Integrated UV Sterilizer/Clarifier. All-in-one pressurized filtering system provides mechanical, biological and UV sterilization/clarification for clear and healthy pond water.

Laguna Pressure-Flo Filters feature a revolutionary patent-pending Backwash-Cleaning System that completely cleans the entire surface of the foam filters without removing the filter lid. An easy-view cleaning indicator signals when it's time to perform backwash cleaning.

Laguna Water Gardening offers complete retail solutions. Laguna retail systems are available in 4 to 20 foot selections. Interactive displays feature Laguna Touch 'n' Tell System.



Add a designer to your staff.



Call the order desk at Trafford Publishing
1-888-232-4444

The best new how-to book to hit the market promotes your garden center as it teaches how to design using mainly plants.

Author **Chase Landre**, a landscape designer for a retail plant nursery, addresses all the common questions she hears every day as she unveils her unique step-by-step design method.

Your customers will love **Design Your Own Landscaping** – and you'll love the profits from increased plant sales!

Write in 773

GREEN GOODS



This sambucus's black and purple foliage makes it a popular plant now that consumers are looking for bold colors. An eye-catching plant will hold a customer's attention at the garden center. (Photo: Proven Winners/ColorChoice)

Seeing Color

Some people want to intensify the standard shrub look. They want a plant's foliage to have a little bit of flair, said Bloome. The foliage should be eye-catching — yellow, purple and black leaves are popular — because the foliage provides color even when the plant is not in bloom. Therefore, the lack of flowers will not keep the customer from enjoying the plant.

"If a plant's not in bloom, it's pretty difficult for consumers to figure out what it is they're buying," said Wood. "It's not like a lot of sales people are always around to answer people's questions and tell them what it's going to look like and to convince them to buy something. The plant has to really sell itself."

Wood keeps an eye on his company's sales and watches for changes. He also checks the Internet to see which trees and shrubs people are talking about. Gardenweb.com keeps him up to date. The Web site has forums where anyone who is interested in gardening can find like-minded people. They can post questions, give advice or just talk about the weather. Lately, Wood said, post after post deals with a prospective plant's color.

Another way to get color all year is through the plant's flowers. The most time and energy being put into new varieties of trees and shrubs is dedicated to cultivating plants that rebloom, said Jonathan Pedersen, marketing manager for Bailey Nurseries, Newport, Minn. Hydrangeas and azaleas that can keep flowers longer are more attractive to consumers.

"In the consumer's eyes, they don't want something that just looks good for 2-3 weeks. They want that color and that flower. Reblooming ability gives that customer longer time with the reason they bought that plant in the first place," Pedersen said.

Seeking Simplicity

Simplicity would also rank high on customers' list of reasons if, in fact, they had time to make a list of reasons. Homeowners now have more obligations than free time and appreciate a plant that does not need much attention. If a plant is easy to take care of, a customer can take it home, stick it in the garden and go about his or her busy life.

"You've got new home owners who spend less time in their yards than the Baby Boom generation did," Pedersen said. "They've got less time, and there's also more choice for their time, too."

But just because these homeowners are busy does not mean they are prepared to sacrifice the pleasures of the garden they want. They just expect the results in less time. And because they don't have the time, someone can go ahead and create the look for them.

"These people want information," explained Pedersen, "but they want it quick, they want it easy, they want it efficient. So, the other trend we're certainly seeing is a lot of these people looking for maintenance and installation — because they like it, like the color, like what it does for the front of their home. But they're not all that excited about doing it themselves." Pedersen points to the deluge of home improvement programming as a cause for "spoiled" gardeners.

POND FREE®

The latest advance in pond technology isn't a pond.

Savio Pond Free® Waterfall Packages combine the majesty of a full-size water garden with the simplicity of a fountain. Waterfall Packages offer highest consumer appeal, easy installation - and great margins to help grow your business.

★★★★★

Stock your garden center with 2006 new 'must have' water garden product!



NEW



Now Available in 2 Sizes - 6' and 11' Waterfalls

SAVIO
EXCELLENCE
Precision Engineered Solutions

Call for a distributor 1-888-333-2356 • www.savio.cc

Write in 866

The foliage provides color even when the plant is not in bloom. Therefore, the lack of flowers will not keep the customer from enjoying the plant.

Creating A Theme

Maintenance and installation crews can take care of the labor, but gardeners provide the creative juices; they decide what will complement their property and increase its beauty. Many times, they find that a central theme will weave disparate plants into a unified garden. Colorful foliage, dwarf plants and reblooming ability all have their roles in creating new garden themes. A gardener starts with a design theme in mind and then chooses from available offerings. Though shade, fragrant and tropical themes remain popular, these new plants may spark new ideas.

"Now you're seeing a lot more Asian and architectural themes coming up," Bloome said. "Yuccas — anything that has a lot of structure and form to it...really distinct form."

Monrovia is in the process of growing more of these types of plants, such as phormiums, cordylines and agaves, to meet this demand. Although Monrovia has always grown some kinds of basic yucca, they are expanding into more exclusive and patented varieties. Some of those varieties incorporate the yellow and purple foliage colors that are popular now.

Bloome isn't sure why such structured plants are in demand, but she said changing lifestyles is one possibility. "They complement, possibly, [a gardener's] home style," Bloome said. "They're really

cool plants, and they're low maintenance. They're very simplistic. They can complement a modern décor or a craftsmen's décor."

The Invasive Debate

But there are other factors to

consider besides what plant fits where. If Gardenweb.com is a good way to judge public gardening sentiment, then quite a few people are concerned about their plants' invasiveness. Will their shrub's seeds spread by the wind?

Will birds scatter a plant's seeds into a neighbor's yard?

One forum poster expressed concern about the invasiveness of a mimosa tree in upstate New York. Yes, it is invasive, many replied, but more so in the South. ♦

What Color is Your MUD

To order or request a catalog:
1-800-860-5813

LITTLE'S GOOD GLOVES

Sedona, AZ 86339 • www.mudglove.com

Write in 826

AQUA PAD

EACH PAD HOLDS 16 OZ. OF WATER
ONE PAD LASTS ALL SEASON
Saves time, water and money!

For Hanging Baskets, Planters and Pots...
Supplies Water to Roots of Plants

REDUCES WATERING BY 85%

- ⇒ Easy To Use
- ⇒ Cost Effective
- ⇒ Each Pad Holds 16 oz. Water
- ⇒ One Pad Lasts All Season
- ⇒ Great When Away For Long Periods
- ⇒ Ideal Where High Wind Dries Soil
- ⇒ Non-Toxic
- ⇒ Available in 5 Pad Retail Pack
- ⇒ Bulk Available for Wholesale
- ⇒ Call or FAX Us For More Information!

NATIONAL BIAS FABRIC CO.
4516 St. Clair Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44103
TEL: 800.321.1079
FAX: 216.361.0811
e-mail: nbfabric@sbcglobal.net

Write in 844

PONDFILTRATION INC.

No more green water!
GUARANTEED!

PL1800 Bio-U.V. Filter

Carbon element grabs debris while UV eliminates algae

Our filters clear 50 gallon to 30,000 gallon ponds!

1-888-766-3217
www.pondfiltration.com

Write in 854

TYPAR®

LANDSCAPE PRODUCTS

Take a look at your lawn and garden area. With every sale of mulch, decorative stone, annuals, perennials, landscaping bushes, trees, driveway gravel and other related items, you have an opportunity to grow incremental sales with Typar Landscape Products and accessories.

Only Typar offers:
A more complete program --
a range of powerful packaging, promotion, and other support that's all part of the Typar program.

For more information on Typar Landscape Products, call: 800-284-2780 or visit: www.typarlandscape.com.

BBA Fiberweb © Copyright 2005



Powerful merchandising -- a complete and organized plan-o-gram with impactful, sales-generating aisle signage, self-dispensing packaging and more.

And because Typar not only markets, but also manufactures the products it sells, Typar is committed to providing only the highest quality fabrics and accessories. Typar's huge manufacturing capacity also means you can count on Typar to keep up with your inventory needs throughout the heavy growing season and year-round with on-time delivery.



BBA Fiberweb™

Write in 761



**ATLAS
GLOVE**
The Original!

Water Gardener™

*I love these
gloves!
I can
play in the
water
without
getting wet!*

For an authorized
distributor, call:
800-426-8860
or e-mail:
gloves@lfsinc.com

IMPORTED &
DISTRIBUTED BY
**ATLAS
GLOVE**
The Original!
CONSUMER PRODUCTS
A DIVISION OF LFS INC

IMPORTED &
DISTRIBUTED BY
**ATLAS
GLOVE**
The Original
CONSUMER PRODUCTS
A DIVISION OF LFS INC.

**Tough Nitrile coating
resists chemicals, punctures, & abrasion
Comfortable cotton liner
Great grip, wet or dry!**

Growers
supply

Factory Direct Prices...
...right to your door!

***FarmTek Growers Supply for all your growing needs.
Serving the Horticultural community for 27 years.***

Material Handling

Benches & Display Racks

**Industrial Grade Fans
& Power-Vented
Heaters**

Ground Covers & Shade Cloth

Poly Carbonate, House Film & Coverings

Mention Promo Code GA0601

Call today **1.800.476.9715** for your **FREE** Master Catalog with over 25,000 items or shop online 24/7 at **www.GrowersSupply.com**

Georgia is one state where mimosa has become a pest. The Georgia Invasive Species Task Force warns the public of planting silk trees because their seeds can be spread by water or animals and are hard to remove once established.

As state agriculture departments continue to update their lists of problem plants, gardeners have turned to sterile and seedless trees and shrubs and plants familiar to the area, Pedersen said.

“People are saying, ‘Do we need these new cultivars? Maybe we should be looking at natural, native stuff,’” he said. “You are seeing somewhat of a resurgence in some natives — although native plants tend not to have what the consumer is looking for generally, in appeal,” he said.

Getting The Word Out

To promote a new plant takes some effort. Building trust in a line of products helps a customer decide to take a risk with a new plant, and branding has been an important vehicle to build that trust. It is one of the most well known promotional techniques. Growers may put their stamp on a product by dressing up the pot or adding a recognizable label.

"Branding is the latest catchphrase in our industry," Pedersen said. "I think we've certainly come to the realization that we have a commodity product and that the mass merchant stores play a fairly large role with where our product gets sold. If we, as growers, don't add value to our product, they're not going to do it for us."

Branding has been slow to come to the horticulture industry, Pedersen said, because growers “are really farmers at heart.” They rely on the product instead of the packaging. The industry marketplace, and tree and shrub brand, are other sectors of the industry.

“Brands aren’t created overnight — not unless there’s an awful lot of money to throw behind them,” Pedersen said. “And when we look at plant products within our industry, really there are very few names that, unaided, you could have the consumer recall. And that’s what a brand does. You ask a consumer, give me two manufacturers of soda, and they’ll come up with them pretty quick. Those are true brands. They’re legacy brands. They have name recall. We’re still trying to build that.”

Building a brand takes a lot of promotion. It takes research, in-store point-of-purchase posters, special marketing for new releases and exclusive varieties. Growers hope that the trees and shrubs being cultivated now will soon become part of a more widespread branding effort. They hope that soon, people may look not only for color or stature but also image. Because branding communicates the values of a company and helps consumers buy products on an emotional level, manufacturers hope there will be no need to shop around. As people get busier and busier, this becomes more important. It makes the buying of a new plant quick and easy, which will keep the consumer coming back to the garden center for any new trendy plants on the market.

Jen Hubert is assistant editor of Lawn & Garden Retailer. She can be reached at (847) 391-1008 or jhubert@sqcmail.com.

LearnMore!

For more information related to this article, go to www.lqrmag.com/lm.cfm/lq040608

Write in 809