

Today's GardenCenter

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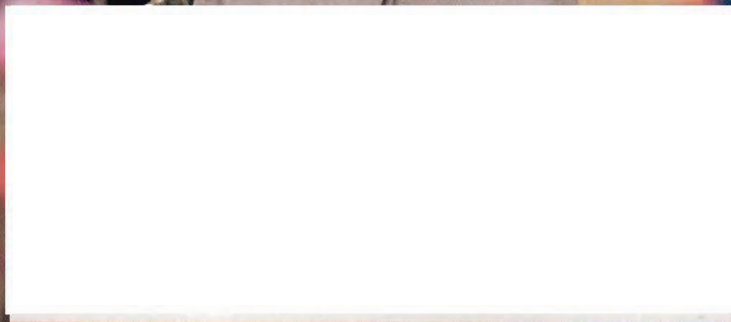
Leading the Revolution in Garden Retailing

Ken Lain

Brad
DeKruyter

Watters Garden Center

The Retailer's Retailer



Special Report:
Revolutionary
100 Roundtable
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Today's Garden Center's

VARIETY CENTRAL

A fresh look at plants and merchandising driving sales • Combo Baskets & Planters



Benary combo



Stars & Stripes, Ecke Ranch



Sky Blue, Pacific Plug & Liner



Suntory combo

Cashing In On Combos

Combination baskets and planters have taken the industry by storm, simplifying gardening in some cases and opening a door to a new breed of consumers.

Scarlet is just another color when presented by itself, as is gray. But present the two as a combination in Columbus, Ohio, and consumers will crave it.

The same goes for maize and blue in Ann Arbor, Mich., aqua and orange in Miami, or purple and gold in Shreveport, La. Consumers crave those respective color combos because they represent the college athletic programs fans live and die for. The color combos are presented rather eccentrically at times – as in desk lamps, dog collars and floor mats – but consumers pay extra for products featuring maize and blue, aqua and orange or purple and gold in large part because of the color combo.

Your varieties can have the same impact on consumers. Garden center retailers don't necessarily need to create or carry combos that work well in their city, region or state based on color – although it's a good idea. Instead, retailers can simply show consumers which varieties work well together or which annuals complement perennials.

Combos also keep maintenance simple for consumers and give them even greater impact from color.

"By keeping it simple, the home gardener has more success for a longer period of time, which makes them feel good about their gardening skills," says Faith Savage, Syngenta Flowers' retail account manager. "When they feel good, they buy more.

If you keep combos to three varieties or so, they'll grow together better without the dominance struggle that often happens with complicated combos of six or more varieties. So, keep it fun and colorful – but most of all keep it simple."

Dozens of breeders are now marketing combos for hanging baskets and planters, and they're keeping them simple with recipes growers can follow. What follows is a starter kit for combos.



Terra Nova perennial combo

Simple Marketing

A new program for 2010 is Hort Couture's "Easy 1, 2, 3," which, as the name suggests, is designed to simplify combos for consumers – and grower-retailers. Grower-retailers will have an easier time with "Easy 1, 2, 3" because Hort Couture has designated a city name to each combination.

Want 'Lapis Blue' nemesia, 'Lipstick Pink' calibrachoa and 'Marshmallow' petunia? That's Hort Couture's Tucson prototype. How about a combo with 'Hip Hop' euphorbia? Check out Hort Couture's Vail, Vancouver and Washington prototypes.

Jim Monroe, Hort Couture CEO, says the idea to market combos by cities originated at his garden centers, Greenbrier Nurseries. "We do combos such as Beckley, Roanoke, White Sulphur Springs and Bluefield for local towns in West Virginia and Virginia where we are located," he says. "It has

VARIETY CENTRAL

Combo Baskets & Planters

worked for us and we have seen customers coming in saying, 'I need three Lewisburgs for my front porch.' It has worked also with retailers who buy from our wholesale division."

Fun With Foliage

Foliage plants, as Terra Nova Nurseries proves, can create just as much interest and provide as many combination options for hanging baskets as blooming plants. Combinations often exist in the form of variegated textures and untraditional color contrasts.

Foliage is all about leaf shapes, vein colors and outlines, textures and flow. Some foliage selections are tall, dramatic and thin, while others are soft and petite. Combinations are often subtle and focus on creating a mood, drawing the eye upward toward the basket and adding spatial dimension.

By blending perennials with four-season foliage interest, consumers are presented with an added value, as blooming combinations typically only provide one or two seasons of color. This also extends the selling window for you.

Easy-To-Do Combos

Homeowners often cite the time it takes to maintain a garden as one of the main reasons they avoid gardening. But container applications for combos like the Always In Bloom drop-in planters from ECGC vendors such as Al's Garden Center and the 30-Second Planters from Proven Winners simplify gardening while offering equally rewarding beauty.

Al's Garden Center unveiled the Always In Bloom program at its three Oregon garden centers two years ago and saw increased consumer interest in the program's second year. The operation's goal, COO Mark Bigej says, is to have customers buy Always In Bloom ceramic pots along with the plastic drop-in planters. Initially, Al's expected ceramic and drop-in pots to sell hand-in-hand, but Bigej says the drop-ins are outselling the ce-



Always In Bloom drop-in combo planters have been a hit at the three Al's Garden Center locations in Oregon the last two years.

ramics. "That's something that took us a little by surprise," he says.

The program at Al's is now set up so drop-in planters are always available. So if combos dry out or customers are planning parties for the weekend, they can pick up fresh inserts to spruce up their front steps and patios.

The 30-Second Planter, on the other hand, is a biodegradable fiber container that's placed directly into a finished container filled with soil. No digging is necessary. Instead, consumers remove a tab from the underside of their 30-Second Planter, which allows their plant's roots to grow directly into the finished container.

It's now available as a complete kit, which includes the exact number of plants needed, the biodegradable fiber containers with an attached pull-tab to remove the bottom, tags, point-of-purchase materials and sign holders. It's available from every Proven Winners propagator in the United States.



More Online:

To see photos of combos from Ball Horticultural Co., Benary, Ecke Ranch, Hort Couture, Pacific Plug & Liner, Plant Haven, Proven Winners, Selecta First Class, The Suntory Collection, Syngenta Flowers and Terra Nova Nurseries, visit TodaysGardenCenter.com. In addition, Mark Bigej goes into more detail about Al's Garden Center's Always In Bloom program in an online-only Q&A.

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