

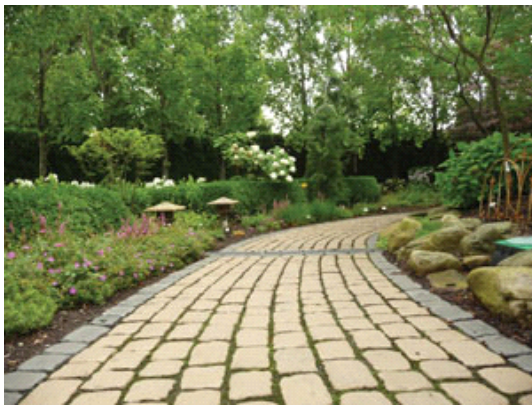
# GROWERTALKS

## Features

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## Profit Potential in Perennials

*Jeff Gibson*



What's on the minds of consumers? What motivates them and how is the market shifting? From the masses that trek to your store on weekends, to the professional landscapers you service, keeping ahead of trends and offering the right solutions helps you better meet their ever-changing needs.

In order to understand the current market, Ball Horticultural Company performed proprietary research last spring with consumers, landscapers and growers. Through our surveys we've uncovered changing perspectives and expectations on

color in the landscape, and caught a glimpse of the current state of affairs for landscape professionals.

### Perennials as Value

One of the landscape trends that made itself clear in our survey was the shift from annuals to perennials. Roughly 34% of our landscape contractor respondents said "perennials" is the most asked about topic by their clients in terms of landscape sustainability. The growers we surveyed correlate that information, with 27% saying their landscape clients are asking them about perennials, as well.

There are many factors contributing to this shift from annuals to perennials, but it all begins with the economy. Home gardeners are looking for plant "investments" that offer good value at an effective cost. For landscapers serving commercial clients, they're finding the soft economy heavily influencing contracts and planting decisions, too.

Landscapers are being asked for better value, which translates to recommendations on where to make cuts. While landscapers are still getting the maintenance and installation contracts, they're finding them cut by 10% to 15%. Sure, a contractor can reduce mowing and lawn service, the number of tree-care services, or turf fertilization, but typically a client will remove a seasonal-color turn.

"Save us money!" the client demands. But as they're not eliminating beds, just reducing the amount of color installations, planting foundation beds of perennials becomes part of the landscape design (multi-season perennials as the cornerstones, with a smaller input of seasonal color).

Don't misunderstand; color is still king. It's been proven that effective injections of annual color increase client renewal rates. That said, landscapers could look to perennials in this shifting market for profit potential. Perennials serve a business purpose, helping retailers satisfy requests for better value for what they're installing.

Consumers surveyed by Ball reveal that perennials have a higher perceived value than annuals. And with this increase in value, customers are generally willing to pay more for an input. So the profit potential for landscapers is two-fold: first with the higher-cost input, and then as a long-term maintenance contract.

## A Growing Landscape Market?

Also uncovered in our landscape survey was that growers (91%) expect their total sales to landscape contractors to stay the same or increase over the next three years. That may seem to go against everything our gut is telling us in this economy. (Didn't I just mention that clients are demanding savings?) But it's actually a reflection of the market shift from design build to maintenance. And maintenance at the commercial and residential level means seasonal color, perennials and flowering trees and shrubs.

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### Consumers' Take On Perennials

Consumers consider perennials the building blocks of the landscape; they contribute color, texture, shape and size to design. Consumers also perceive perennials as a better plant investment and forgiving in nature, equating to less risk.

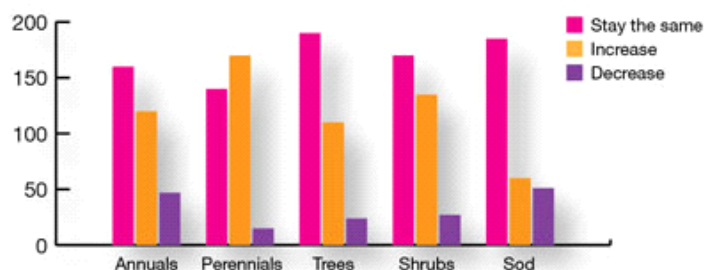
### Resources For Landscapers

Ball Landscape offers Thrive, a new resource available now. Visit [www.BallLandscape.com](http://www.BallLandscape.com) to examine the new 20-page brochure filled with plant recommendations for landscape success. Retailers can browse the brochure online, and request additional copies for landscape clients.

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What perennial varieties should landscapers consider? Consumers perceive perennials as "hardy, lasting and enduring." Planting durable villosa-type heucheras, such as Big Top from Darwin Perennials, extends the season of interest first with large-sized foliage, to a colorful bloom period, and on to more texture later in the season. Long-blooming perennials with proven hardiness, such as PowWow Echinacea or Lacey Blue Russian Sage, contribute color and shape to landscape design, and offer many seasons of maintenance attention by landscapers.

Over the next three years, do you expect your expenditures for these segments to increase, decrease or stay the same?



At the retail level, since many of these varieties are multi-season plants, there is sales opportunity during the blooming period, as well as later for foundation plantings. Perennials can be purchased and transplanted many times during the season. Shrubs like Flutterby Petite Buddleia or Bombshell Hydrangea can be purchased over a longer flowering time, and perform in the landscape that way, as well. In short, consumers can shop year-round for perennials.

As a global color leader, Ball is very concerned with the market shift toward perennial or “sustainable” planting. Recognizing this movement a decade ago gave rise to businesses initiatives that expanded our product mix. The purchase of Darwin Perennials and Kieft-Pro-Seeds, and the broadening of our Ball Ornamentals business, is our way of meeting our clients’ changing needs.

Retailers interested in providing sales solutions to landscape customers can uncover their own profit potential through a sharper focus on perennials. GP

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