

2017 NEW VARIETIES

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INTRODUCTIONS



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‘I WANT IT ALL,’ say today’s plant enthusiasts

In 2017, consumers want plants that are beautiful, different, easy to care for, fragrant, beneficial to the environment ... and so much more!

BY TREENA HEIN

Anyone who’s shopped for plants this year has no doubt noticed the changes. Simply put, it’s not your mother’s gardening centre anymore.

Today’s retailers offer a selection that would have been all but unimaginable a few short years ago. Move over geraniums and pansies, it’s a whole new ballgame.

Someone who knows a great deal about current consumer desires is Dr. Amy Bowen, consumer insights research program leader at the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre in Vineland, Ontario.

One big consumer trend – ethnic flowers – is currently being studied by Bowen and her colleagues in an effort to narrow down recommendations for commercialization. “This trend builds on the introduction of ethnic vegetables like okra and eggplant into the Canadian marketplace over the last few years,” Bowen explains. “It’s now spilling over into ethnic flowers.”

Although the team won’t be releasing any study results until the fall, Vineland has already taken part in bringing one ethnic flower to market.

In April, Vineland (working in collaboration with partners Longo’s grocery chain and Westbrook Floral Inc. of Grimsby, Ont.) launched Ontario-grown jasmine plants (*Jasminum sambac*) in time for Vaisakhi. A larger launch will occur in the fall to coincide with Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights.

Indeed, the release was targeted at South Asian consumers, whom Vineland says spend approximately \$60 million on cut and potted flowers in the Toronto area alone every year. A Vineland survey of new Canadians from South, East and Southeast Asia found that over 80 per cent of them are missing plants from their home country and wish they could purchase them here.

In terms of cultivation, trials at both Vineland (conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs greenhouse floriculture specialist Dr. Chevonne Carlow) and at Westbrook have shown that this jasmine variety does well in summer heat, making it a great option for greenhouses after the spring bedding plants are gone.

“Not only does jasmine provide consumers with nostalgia and spiritual ties to their cultural heritage, but it reflects the desire for fragrance, a trend that’s also big right now,” Bowen explains.

Brian Minter agrees. “People are re-connecting to plants through fragrance, tactile qualities and fun edibles with new flavours,” says the owner of Minter Gardens in Chilliwack, B.C. Edible flowering plants include chives and lavender.

Sheridan Nurseries president Karl Stensson confirms that the edible trend is strong, and that “there are no signs this will slow down anytime soon.”

EASY AND ENVIRONMENTAL

Another 2017 consumer trend centres around plants that are easy on the Earth – and easy to look after. “Environmental values are very important,” Minter explains, “such as pollinator-friendly, cleaning air in homes, and minimal care/drought tolerant.”

Mark Cullen (the spokesperson and horticultural consultant to Home Hardware Canada) agrees wholeheartedly that more and more consumers want to provide pollen-rich and nectar-rich flowering plants for attracting and supporting bees, hummingbirds and butterflies.

“People want to grow these things, not just because they look beautiful but because they add to our biodiversity,” he explains. “It has to do with an emerging consciousness about the importance of our pollinators. One-third of the food that we eat is pollinated by the natural world.”

He believes millennials are mostly driving this trend, and that their parents and grandparents have become concerned because of this interest by millennial family members.

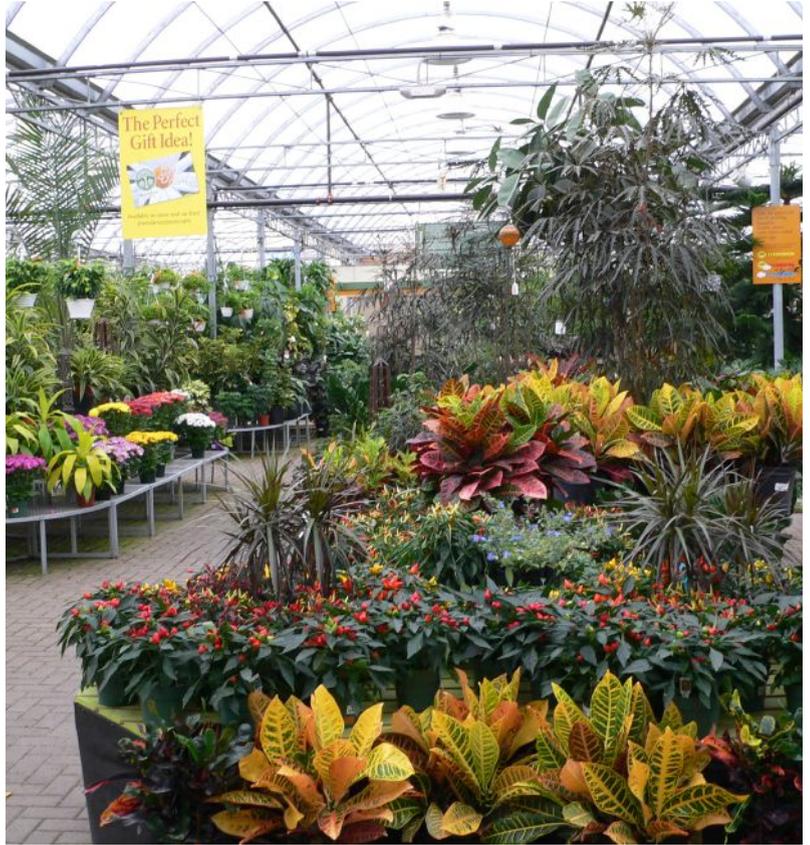
Easy-care perennials are also in demand as they don’t require re-planting every year, and some of them get larger and fill in a flower bed over time in an easy, automatic manner.

“The perennial plant growers are really challenging the rest of the growers in the business to step up to the plate and it’s all



ABOVE AND ON THE COVER

‘Canadian Shield™’ was awarded “Plant Of The Year” at this year’s Canada Blooms show.



ABOVE (CLOCKWISE) Infiniti® Magenta Crapemyrtle is one of the new plants generating a lot of attention among Sheridan Nurseries customers. A display of houseplants at the Mississauga location of Sheridan Nurseries. Jasmine has considerable market potential, according to research at the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre.

about performance,” Cullen says. “Just how long will it hold its blossom, for example?”

Vineland recently released a new winter hardy, easy-care and disease-resistant rose called ‘Canadian Shield™,’ which was awarded “Plant Of The Year” at this year’s Canada Blooms show.

Another easy care (and exotic) option is orchids. “We’ve seen a huge increase in the demand and popularity,” says Stensson. “Through social media, we are convincing people that orchids are not difficult to grow and that they last months instead of weeks compared to the more traditional and cheaper flowering pot plants.”

MILLENNIALS ARE INCREASINGLY INFLUENTIAL

You’ve no doubt heard that millennials like to garden. They lead the charge in terms of wanting plants that provide multiple functions, but Minter says they also want novelty items and aren’t overly concerned about cost. “The older generation (55 plus) is starting to follow millennials in looking for new stuff,” he notes, “and many favourite ‘oldies’ are falling away such as pansies, mums, old traditional annuals like dusty miller.”

He adds that millennials also want to know how to care for plants.

Bowen agrees. “They want straightforward information on whether a plant is easy to care for or more difficult, does it need a lot of light or not, does it need deadheading, how to use it,” she explains.

“They don’t want cryptic symbols. Millennials use the Internet a lot, but we shouldn’t forget that labelling is important, along with good retail staff who help reinforce what millennial

consumers have learned from the Internet. If we give them a positive introduction to gardening, they will get hooked on it.”

Stensson notes that the Greater Toronto Area is seeing a large number of condominiums being constructed and there is a related retail boom to supply container gardens on balconies.

“This has been growing for a number of years,” he says. “The trend within container gardening is to use a mixture of annuals, perennials, greenhouse plants and home décor pieces. We used to only group annuals together or perennials together thinking ‘traditionally’ that these should be together.”

Sales of greenhouse foliage plants at Sheridan Nurseries have skyrocketed the last three years, easily growing at over 25 per cent each year. Some are being used in container gardening. More exotics are also in demand.

“Using \$100 hibiscus, crotons and mandevillas as centre pieces does not scare off the guest who wants ‘unique and different’ in a small space,” he says.

Air plants are also receiving “huge” interest at Sheridan, which is allowing the firm to sell large numbers of glass containers. Succulents are another category of plants being used in containers both indoors and out.

Indeed, a growing demand for indoor plants is another strong trend in itself. Stensson notes that interest in indoor flowering plants has grown, as has interest in growing herbs indoors over the winter.

“Living walls are also very popular,” he adds, “and offer a new twist.”

Treana Hein is a freelance writer in Ontario.