

Grow Successful Combos Using Color and Best Practices



The best mixes start with color selection and end with following proper culture guidelines.

BY BECKY LACY

This year, GardenResearch.com conducted the 2018 “What Gardeners Think” survey. Among its findings it showed a boom in “Do it for me” gardening. What is more DIFM than pre-mixed plant combos? The study also reported that while Americans are enjoying gardening more, they still dislike specific obstacles to their success; weeds, insects and horrid soil conditions top their list of challenges. Again, problems that can all be solved with a take-and-go hanging basket or patio container.

COLOR TRENDS AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COLOR

If you didn’t already know, growers are in the color business. We can use that and our language of flowers to provide deeper meanings to the combos we produce. Successful mixes start with the right blend of colors. Think about all the mental and emotional effects color has on the human brain: Colors affect how we feel. They can be irritating or calming. Evoke warmth or cold. They can have cultural interpretations, or be uniquely personal.



BEJEWELED - FINISHING

8 Weeks after transplant



B-Nine 2,500/Cycocel 750 ppm



Bonzi 3 ppm

For instance: Red is a warm color; it portrays bold, strong emotions of love and other intensities. Blue is a cool color; calming and serene, it can be a soothing choice.

We also can have seasonal desires for certain colors (such as patriotic mixes and softer Mother's Day blends). Soft colors bring us into spring (pinks and lavender). Warm colors for summer (red and hot pink). For autumn, it's décor all the way (orange, yellow and even black).

So regardless of how well certain varieties grow together in high-quality mixes, if the combination doesn't make the customer "feel good" then it won't end up in their shopping cart.

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Growers should certainly pay attention to modern color trends. Keep your finger on that pulse through color experts like Pantone. When they announce their next Color of the Year, take advantage of your greenhouse assortment and showcase something special to fit right in.

Other market trends to watch for include:

Small spaces. Hanging baskets are excellent for this trend, as no garden is needed.

Secondary uses. Produce combos that offer texture, or are edible, scented and useful!

Water-wise. Drought-tolerant and easy-to-maintain combos will continue to appeal to time-strapped and new gardeners. Pollinator friendly. Provide an easy way for shoppers to join the Million Pollinator Challenge.

Indoor and tropical. Not all gardening happens outdoors. Create an indoor oasis with the right combos.

Shade gardens. Brighten up low-light gardens with smart choices that thrive in the shade.

The list goes on for current garden market trends! From the consistent appeal of miniature and fairy gardens, to the joys of novelty plants, today's gardener can find the ready-made combo that's right for them.

When the expert team at Ball FloraPlant sets out to create new recipes for its MixMasters program, several factors are considered.

- 1. Regionality.** Where will the combo grow well, or will it work nationally? Our team wants a retailer to pick a MixMasters recipe and have success coast-to-coast, but we also want to use genera that work in regional areas, too. This is why we use a wide variety of genera in our assortments.
- 2. Timing.** All Ball FloraPlant mixes are trialed to last through the end of summer. They flower together in the beginning, and go out together.
- 3. Vigor.** We evaluate the vigor of individual varieties to provide the best culture practices. Then we take the recipe's vigor as a whole into consideration, so that one or two components don't overgrow. Compact-growing varieties also make it easy to transport to retail for early sales, so they don't stretch in low light.
- 4. Seasonality.** There's the holiday and general "feel" of the season to consider, but also day length neutrality is important in all of our breeding.
- 5. Longevity at retail.** To become a MixMasters recipe, the combo must provide continuous blooming on retail shelves and on into the consumer's garden for 6 to 8 weeks after purchase.

All of these factors go into the trialing and combo process for our recipes.

CULTURAL BEST PRACTICES

The great thing about combinations is that the only limitation is the imagination. However, this makes universal culture guidelines tricky. Our vegetative combos provide 16 genera and about 52 recipes for every color combination and season. To simplify the culture guidelines, let me break up the mixes into three categories using our "bread and butter" genera.

- Vigorous petunia + mix
 - Compact bidens, lobelia, verbena mix
 - All calibrachoa mix
- All guidelines use a 35 mm liner

with three components per liner. Pinch approximately five weeks after stick once the liner is fully rooted and all components can be pinched. This will allow larger and smaller components to be pinched simultaneously. Transplant pinched liners, three plants per

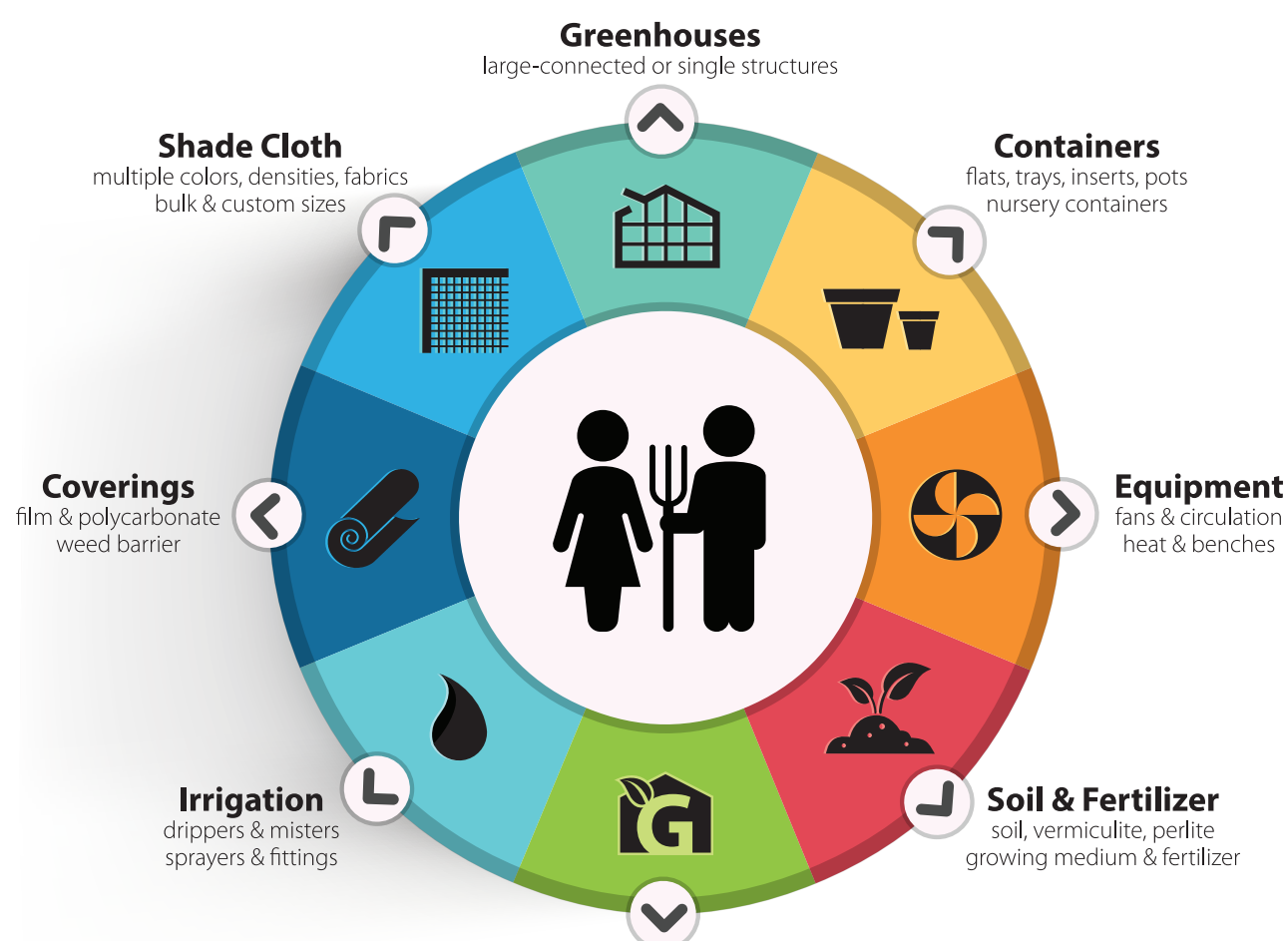
pot (ppp) five weeks after stick. General control five to six weeks after transplant (approximately two weeks after sheer) is a B-Nine 2,500/Cycocel 750-ppm tank spray.

For the vigorous combos, the more vigorous components will

begin to out-grow the compact components. Example: Bejeweled has a petunia and verbena that are more vigorous than its calibrachoa. One light shear approximately three to four weeks after transplant will allow you to trim more vigorous components,

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VARIETY INFORMATION

and allow more compact growth to continue to grow and even out.

When close to finish, a Bonzi 3- to 5-ppm drench application can provide uniform control throughout the mix to hold its size on all components. Note: Sprays tend to hit the more-vigorous growth first and allow the more-compact growth and less-developed lateral branching to emerge and continue to grow.

Circus Parade is a more compact combo, with a bidens, lobelia and verbenas. Again, one light shear approximately three to four weeks after transplant will allow growth to even out. Once its target size and shape is achieved, a Bonzi 3- to 5-ppm drench application can provide uniform control throughout mix to hold size on all components.

A shear on combos like Panorama, which has one genus and a much more uniform component series, will promote more lateral branching and uniformity. The B-Nine tank spray can be applied only if needed or desired. Sprays should be applied more uniformly for this mix to hold size and shape. Once the target size and shape is achieved closer to finish, a Bonzi 3- to 5-ppm drench application will hold finish size.

CONCLUSION

When dealing with multi-liner combos, it's good to know there are best practices out there. We have specialists in every area, and customers can always check our website for culture guidelines, videos and more. Also, all of our combo recipe components will always come from one farm. This solves a problem many growers run into — not getting all components at the same time. When recipes come from the same farm, you're guaranteed all varieties make it to your facility together.

Market trends show the sales opportunities ready-made combos afford. And while creating your own mixes is fun, allowing you to choose the genetics you want, I will always recommend that growers use trialed recipes by the breeding companies. These are proven recipes that will work consistently and give the end-user the best chance at success. [gpn](#)

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SALES TIPS FOR *Retailers*

Basket combinations

are an excellent item to promote at retail. They are high-value decorative items and everyone has a place in their home for a basket. No yard? No problem! But be sure to provide a wide variety of options, as baskets as décor means everyone has their own preferences.

I spoke to Ball Independent Business Manager Bill Calkins for some tips on retail success with combos. Here's what he had to share:

- Customers make decisions using visual cues and color. Always put eye-catching color-dense plants in the front of the store for impulse sales.
- You can use color blocking to target certain audiences and specific types of consumers:
 - » Black is for luxury
 - » Pink for a feminine touch
 - » Yellow can be youthful and head turning
 - » Purple is soothing
- Aesthetics are important. Shoppers may not return if they find a store layout bland or confusing. Organize your store based on the type of shopper. What is the best plant for my lifestyle? Create areas for high value impulse buys and areas for buyers on a budget. This can be done by small pot combinations in one area, and other areas for larger decorative pots with added high-value components in another.
- Add DIY project sheets around the store for small, achievable weekend projects. Arrange basket stuffer items nearby for shoppers to customize their ready-made combos.

