

## Features

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## Unique Combos for 2024

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Suppose your garden center has a dedicated staff to design and keep hanging baskets and planters looking fresh throughout the growing season. In that case, you'll find that you're getting a return on investment, according to C.L. Fornari, head of educational programs and writer for Hyannis Country Garden in Hyannis, Massachusetts.

For example, C.L. explains that Hyannis Country Garden's manager, responsible for assembling window boxes and hanging baskets, always looked for end-of-season closeouts to find containers at a bargain. Then he brought in the plugs and employees assembled these baskets to sell for the new growing season.

*Pictured: Petchoa EnViva Pink from Selecta One North America.*

- *Big EEZE Pink Batik Geranium from Dümme Orange.*
- *Cherishing Cherry combination from Selecta One North America, which includes Oscar Purple Star Dianthus and Oscar Cherry+Velvet Dianthus.*

In other words, everything was done in-house, including maintaining those planters and hanging baskets in the nursery.

"We were making a good profit from those containers," said C.L. "That's a reason to do it yourself."

There are other reasons why garden retailers can make good money creating, displaying, maintaining and selling seasonal hanging baskets and planters: They carve out a niche market to sell plants that other growers aren't serving. For example, C.L. said that Hyannis Country Garden would make wedding planters that included Princess Lobularia, which a garden center can sell from March through October. C.L. said that Cape Cod can have up to 30 to 40 weddings in one September weekend, and brides want something more than mums and other fall flowers in their wedding planters.

Another reason to plant it up yourself is to meet the demand of your core customers. For example, many Millennials and GenZers live in small spaces and are busy with work and family. This busy generation wants to incorporate healthy vegetables and herbs into their cooking. A garden center can make life easier by designing edibles in

planters and hanging baskets for Zoomers and Millennials.

## Drawing From Unique Components

C.L. suggested that organic foliage edibles—such as sage, thyme, Tuscan kale and golden oregano—can be used in planters and containers starting in the spring that will last throughout the fall.

And Diane Blazek from the National Garden Bureau agreed. When asked about ideas going beyond the traditional petunia, verbena and calibrachoa combos, Diane said, “Edibles! Herbs. Foliage. Eucalyptus. Try using perennials as annuals in containers and the newer compact shrubs, too.”

Diane recommended PanAmerican Seed and PureLine Seeds because both companies focus on compact edibles that can be grown in containers.

“At PanAmerican, the Quick Snack Cucumber is one of the newer varieties in that series. And PureLine just introduced Tiny Temptations Orange Tomato,” Diane added.

Another way to draw customers in with containers and combos is by using the color wheel to create color combinations that evoke emotion and increase sales.

“Plant combinations using color theory evoke emotion in your consumer. Some combinations just make you so happy when you see them, so don’t forget to have fun, and make some new and unique combos,” said Becky Lacey, product manager for Selecta One North America and Ball FloraPlant.



## What’s New This Spring

Becky said a new variety of dianthus is coming from a Kenya Selecta farm this spring, which can make an impact in combos. Some of the new Oscar varieties have an upright thriller effect, while others are more compact and mounding, making them great additions to spring containers and planters.

*Pictured: The combo called All Right from Proven Winners, with Angel Wings Senecio, Solenia Chocolate Orange Begonia and ColorBlaze Chocolate Drop Coleus.*

*• Heart to Heart Rain or Shine Caladium from Proven Winners.*

Becky said the farm can ship unrooted cuttings directly to the U.S. compared to when it took two years to quarantine the newer varieties. Now, garden centers will have more dianthus varieties that can be annual or perennial.

“[The Selecta Oscar Dianthus varieties are] going to be a really good early-season product. One of the reasons for that is that it works in a cold chain, so you can ship it on a cold truck where a lot of plants would normally suffer in those conditions. It’s probably the new, exciting item,” Becky said, adding these options have bright, bold colors.

Consider texture and monochromatic looks, too, depending on your customer base and what they’re looking for, said Kate Spirgen, marketing specialist at Proven Winners. She mentioned newer options like Angel Wings Senecio for an irresistible textured silvery look, as well as Heart to Heart Rain or Shine Caladium as a new option for a rosy

thriller. Tropicals are popular in mixes, too, and the Toucan Scarlet Improved Canna provides a beachy vibe for summer pots.

“Don’t be afraid to take some chances,” Kate added. “There’s some really cool stuff out there right now. Younger customers are willing to take chances and buy something out there.”

## Season Extenders

Becky noted one of her wow factor container flowers includes sanvitalia, whose habit and colors are similar to bidens, but last longer in the summer.

“It has a bright yellow flower like a bidens, but it does better in the heat than a bidens. Usually, bidens get lots of seedheads and fizzle out early in the summertime,” she said. “So if you’re looking for a super standout bright yellow color, I recommend checking out some of the more vigorous sanvitalia.”

Selecta’s Tsavo Sanvitalia series works well in containers. It’s an early season variety with bright yellow blossoms counterbalanced with dark foliage. The Tsavo series has compact vigor and is mounded with high density.

Becky gave the example of putting together Gathering Goodies for Dynamix (a series of container recipes) that uses Selecta’s Sunrise Brilliant Red Zonal Geranium, Gisele Purple Phlox and Tsavo Compact Yellow Sanvitalia. This combination uses warm summery tones and it’s a season extender.

Another season-extending option called petchoa can provide retailers with a longer-blooming annual. Selecta has EnViva Petchoa, a hybrid of petunias and calibrachoa that brings the benefits of each genus into play, as it blooms spring to fall.

Diane recommends EnViva Pink Petchoa and Big EEZE Pink Batik Geranium for unique planters and hanging baskets. Both varieties were All-America Selections (AAS) Winners.

“Based on what we are seeing in our New Plant submissions and AAS entries, it looks like there is an opportunity for monoculture planters and baskets,” Diane said.

BallFloraPlant will upload 2024 inspiration through its FunFusions web page and Selecta with its Dynamix page. For example, FunFusion’s webpage has container recipes, such as “Angelica in Amsterdam,” a season extender featuring AngelDance Angelonia, and “Spring in Santorini,” combining white and blue lobelia for a cooler Mediterranean flavor. Proven Winners has its own catalog of container recipes that can be found on the website (see the sidebar for the link).

This year, commit to stocking up on these unique combinations using color theory, edibles, bold foliage and season extenders in containers that excite your customers to buy them for their outdoor décor. **GP**

## Build Your Own Containers

Find more hanging baskets and planter inspiration at the following websites.

**Ball FloraPlant:** [ballfloraplant.com/products/funfusions.aspx](https://ballfloraplant.com/products/funfusions.aspx)

**National Garden Bureau:** [ngb.org/combination-ideas](https://ngb.org/combination-ideas)

**Proven Winners:** [provenwinners.com/professionals/online-catalogs](https://provenwinners.com/professionals/online-catalogs)

**Selecta Dynamix:** [selectanorthamerica.com/Dynamix](https://selectanorthamerica.com/Dynamix)

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