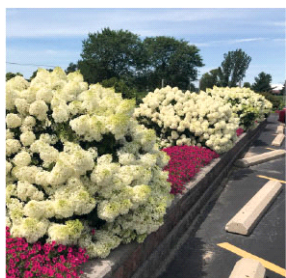


Features

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Traffic-Stopping Color

Jennifer Polanz



It really can happen—with mass plantings and beautiful, large containers you really can stop traffic.

“It definitely has a tendency to attract people’s attention,” says Jason Rymer, gardens category manager at The Gardens at Elders, freshly rebranded from Elder’s Ace Hardware, in Tennessee. “Especially in peak season. I’ve actually had people driving by and say they had to stop and see what it was.”

Heidi Grasman of Garden Crossings in Zeeland, Michigan, concurs. “The customers love it, and when we post what’s blooming we often get orders and requests for the plants that are blooming,” she says. “It is certainly a 55-mph head-turner.”

Curb Appeal Details

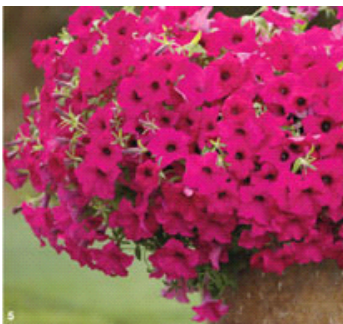
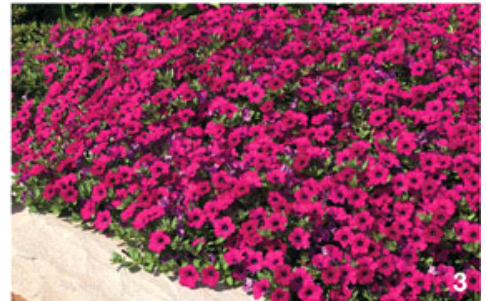
The stores Heidi and Jason work for both approach the plantings in slightly different ways, and I’m going to highlight both here. All of the 22 Elder’s stores are Ace Hardwares, but not all have a full-scale garden center. Only six of the stores include a full garden center and those are the ones being rebranded The Gardens at Elder’s. His company pays for the plantings out of each store’s supply account and not all feature mass plantings because of space constraints. The ones that don’t plant en masse feature large mixed containers to draw the customer’s eye from afar.

Jason says they’ll switch out plantings three times: first in the early spring with yellow pansies planted under red tulips, then Proven Winners Vista Supertunias (like Bubblegum, Fuchsia and Silverberry) for summer color, and finally yellow helianthus for fall.

Garden Crossings works the cost of the plants and labor it takes to plant and maintain into the marketing budget. They plant once in the spring and let it ride until they close in the late fall. Their favorites include the Supertunias also, as well as annuals like Lemon Coral Sedum, along with Smooth Hydrangeas like Bobo, Invincebelle Spirit, Incrediball and Limelight, among others. They also add in perennials like baptisia, veronica and Shasta daisy. The goal? “We really want our landscape to be a Proven Winners live catalog for our customers to shop from,” Heidi says.

Show-Stopping Color

There are lots of great options out there to create mass plantings and containers that stop potential customers in their tracks. Here are just a few:



An All-America Selections Winner, Wave Carmine Velour Petunia from PanAmerican Seed features massive blooming power from spring into late summer. It's a low-growing, wide-spreading Wave Petunia that stands up well in both heat and cool temperatures.

When it comes to flower power and low-maintenance, the Megawatt Begonia series from PanAmerican Seed gets the nod. Great in mass plantings and containers, Megawatts spread well and hold up in heat and drought conditions, showing color spring through fall. It's available in pink and red flower colors with both bronze and green leaves.

The magenta blooms explode off of Itsy, a new petunia introduction from Syngenta Flowers. The blooms may be small, but they blanket this low-maintenance spreader that features a controlled habit and exceptional branching. According to the folks at Syngenta, there are more colors in the works for this series, and this photo is from a southern trial, so you know it takes the heat and humidity.

If you're looking for a crisp, white flower with lots of blooming power, Suntory Flowers offers up Soiree Kawaii White Peppermint. White Peppermint is part of the new line of heat-loving catharanthus that also feature deep green foliage. It'll bloom from spring to fall and stays compact, spreading to about 18-in. wide.

Also from Suntory Flowers, the Surfinia Sumo series is a massive spreader, reaching up to 55-in. wide. That makes it a vigorous habit with lots of use in mass plantings and containers. There are four colors in the series—Pink, Glacial Pink, Plum and Bold Lilac. These, too, will keep blooming from spring to fall.

Checklist for Success

Here are a couple of tips from Heidi and Jason on creating successful traffic-stopping plantings:

- Plan ahead. Don't just plant up extras, make a plan ahead of time. Jason works with his grower to have a

dedicated amount grown just for the store plantings.

- Have someone on the team “own it,” Jason says. That means whoever it is keeps the schedule of fertilization and trimming, as well as when to change out the plantings. Heidi has one person who’s in charge of planting, weeding and maintenance. That person works two to three days a week planting in the spring and then one to two days a week on maintenance in the summer.
- Order or grow larger containers for less labor and quicker spreading. Jason orders 8-in. pots while Heidi grows 6-in. annuals.
- For mixed containers, consider self-watering pots. Jason uses the new large ceramic AquaPots from Proven Winners and has reduced his watering schedule with them. **GP**