



# HIGH IMPACT, LOW MAINTENANCE LANDSCAPES

BY JESSIE ATCHISON

**G**reen is great. It's the prevalent color of the lush turf, towering trees, and dense hedges that provide the basis for many successful landscapes. However, green is only the beginning! Nothing brings attention to your work like using colorful annuals in the landscape. Well-executed use of color is just one way to continually promote the value of your services and annuals are among the most colorful, versatile plants for the job. Changing the annuals in a bed from one season to the next can provide a dramatic change that keeps the whole site fresh.

If you know the basics of designing with color and how to select and care for the best annual varieties, you can create the perfect landscape combination: a high impact design with low maintenance requirements.

## Opposites attract

Combining colors in the most eye-catching way is one key to creating a high impact planting. There's really no such thing as too much color in a planting, but too many distinct colors can really make the wrong impression. Instead, choose a color scheme and use it consistently throughout the planting. Remember that opposites do attract; colors set across from each other on the color wheel, like yellow and purple, combine nicely.

In general, most "hot" and "cool" colors complement each other well, even if they aren't really "opposites." An example would be combining red and purple in a planting, like Purple Lady iresine and Vista Red salvia. Using similar colors (those next to each other on a color wheel) like orange and yellow can produce a stunning combination. Monochromatic schemes (those using a range of shades in one main color) can create a big impact as well, particularly in large plantings. Pay attention to foliage color, too; foliage comes in lots of different shades (don't assume it's just green!) and should complement the bloom colors you're using. Finally, a good rule of thumb is to use light or very vibrant shades against dark backgrounds and darker colors against

pale backdrops; this will keep the plants visible, creating the maximum visual impact.

All mowers, trimmers, and trucks are not created equal, and neither are all annual varieties. Choosing the best-performing varieties for your site will go a long way toward managing the maintenance requirements of the planting. Also, top-performing plants will, with proper care, look good all season.

To be sure you're making the best variety decisions, ask some basic questions. First, think about the site itself. Is the climate hot or cool? Does the site receive a lot





of sunlight, or is it mostly shaded? Answering these questions will help you narrow down your choices of suitable plant material for the job. If you're not sure which varieties fit your needs, your local grower or extension agent are valuable resources. When considering specific varieties, think about the growth habit of the plant. How tall does it get? How far does it spread? Knowing about plant habits helps you choose plants that will reach the proper height or width for the site and keeps you from inadvertently planting tall varieties in front of lower growing ones or planting vigorously spreading varieties in very small spaces. To keep things simple for your maintenance crews, pay attention to watering and fertilizer requirements, and plant varieties with similar needs together.

Most of all remember: all petunias, geraniums, impatiens, and so on are not the same. Even within one genus, individual varieties can be quite different. For example, one Wave petunia plant can spread up to 4 feet in the landscape, more than twice the spread of a standard petunia. Additionally, Wave varieties don't require deadheading, so they require less maintenance than other varieties. If you use just any petunia, you might not be getting the best possible variety for your needs.

#### Basic care tips

Again, keep it simple: take note of the care requirements for different varieties and combine varieties with similar needs. Use enough annuals to plant them close together to fill in the bed quickly, but don't overcrowd the plants. Regular watering helps plants get established in the ground. Above all, select easy-care, very colorful varieties, whether they're known for their flowers or their foliage. Dragon Wing begonia, Landmark lantana, Wave petunia, Aztec trailing verbena, and Fiesta double impatiens are just a few of the eye-catching solutions available. Their color provides the impact; their good performance makes them easy to maintain.

Still not sure where to start? Here are a few ideas to get you started.

Containers: Plants in containers require a little more water and fertilizer than those in the ground, but containers really can be low maintenance. It's simple to change, replace or altogether remove them if necessary, and they have the added bonus of putting color in places where beds aren't possible, like sidewalks or entryways. Another big benefit is that containers generally don't require weeding, because the plants in con-

tainers don't leave and space for weeds to grow.

Seasonal color. Changing the look of a planting for different seasons is quite simple. For early spring or fall, try Sorbet violas. They're available in a huge array of colors and, because their peak performance is during the seasons when most schools are in session, they can even be used for landscapes in school colors! When planted in the



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## CAREFULLY CONSIDER COLOR COMBINATIONS AND PLANT SELECTIONS; THINKING NOW MEANS LESS WORK LATER.

fall, they'll overwinter in most areas and return for a second show of color in spring. Summer is a great time for petunias, impatiens or other warm-weather plants that are available in lots of hot hues, so the colors fit the temperature. Violas and petunias perform best in full sun; New Guinea impatiens prefer shade to partial shade areas.

Large mixed plantings. Combine plants of different heights and habits to create interesting plantings with lots of impact. Planting a tall variety like Purple Majesty ornamental millet with mid-height or low-growing plants like Wave petunias around it makes a big statement in full sun. Just be sure the plants you use have the same light, water and care requirements, as these do.

Small space solutions. You can pack a lot of color into a small space if you use the right plants. Designer geraniums have large blooms in bright shades and perform well in both large and small-scale plantings. They perform best in full sun.

It is possible to create successful landscapes that are both high impact and low



maintenance. The bottom line is that you must carefully consider color combinations and plant selections. Up front thinking now means less work later, so spend some time planning the project to ensure great results.

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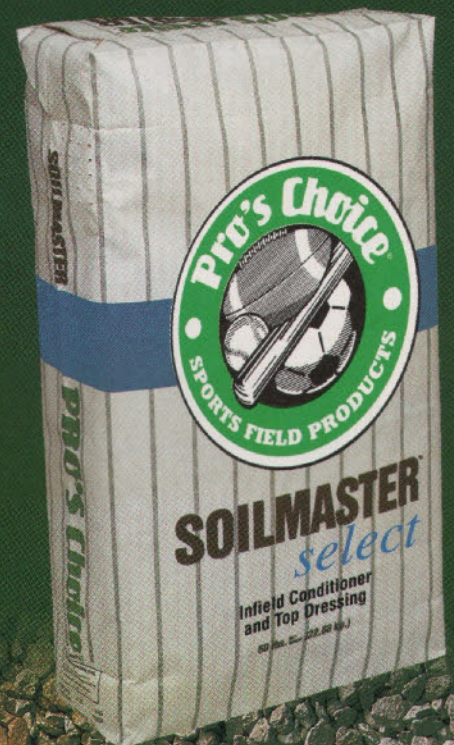
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