

Right: Garden Fever, a retailer based in Portland, Oregon, offers a bright lime green *Cupressus macrocarpa* 'Wilma Goldcrest' for the holiday season. PHOTO COURTESY OF GARDEN FEVER

Left: Containers of *Astilbe* 'Boogie Woogie', *Hosta* 'Guacamole', and Japanese painted fern, *Vinca* 'Illumination' are created at Smith Gardens.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SMITH GARDENS



A green renewal

Trend watchers say green is the hot color, which has implications for garden retailers

BY KYM POKORNY

WHETHER MUTED OR BRIGHT, foliage or flower, color drives the nursery industry, and many trend setters say green is the Color of the Year for 2022.

The first announcement came at last summer's Cultivate'21 trade show from Garden Media Group, a marketing firm that specializes in the green industry. After a year of research, the Pennsylvania company led the way with a proclamation that green — healthy green clover — is the hottest, trendiest color for the green industry.

The large paint companies, traditional predictors of Color of the Year, followed by selecting green in late summer and fall.

The best known expert on color, Pantone, went its own way and declared periwinkle blue the color of the year, but the

vast majority of authorities chose green in a variety of shades. Behr chose Breezeway, a sea glass green; Sherwin-Williams selected gray-green Evergreen Fog; Better Homes & Gardens picked Laurel Leaf, a dusty eucalyptus green; and Benjamin Moore decided on soft, silvery October Mist.

The trend is clear. No matter what shade of green, it's hot this year.

"After our research, we really narrowed in on green," said Katie Dubow, creative director of Garden Media. "We could see the one thread running through is nature. It signifies renewal and rebirth. That's where we are right now. It's also that so much of the past 18 months people have been immersing themselves in nature. They're spending more time outside tapping into the health ben-



A green renewal



Tom Fischer (center), editor with Timber Press introduced new gardening and plant books at Garden Fever events

PHOTO COURTESY OF GARDEN FEVER



Houseplant display at Garden Fever entices customers with lush greenery

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efits that come with nature. That's why we picked it."

Denise Mullins, director of product innovation at **Smith Gardens** in Aurora, Oregon, has noticed how foliage-focused folks are right now.

"That's why green is the trend," she said. "Tropical foliage is on a crazy upward swing, especially in houseplants. Supply is low, though. I have fellow plant nerd friends who propagate at home and

Vinca 'Illumination', *Heuchera 'Fire Alarm'*, *Carex 'Prairie Fire'*, and *Spirea 'Magic Carpet'* complete this container.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SMITH GARDENS

sell online. It's a green trend. People want to be surrounded by plants."

Paying attention to color

Paying attention to color trends can make a difference to the bottom line, according to Dubow. From ordering to merchandising to customer communication, retailers can use this information to offer customers what they see in magazines, online and on TV and, in turn, are inspired to buy.

Color trends take a while to trickle down from the fashion runways where they all start. Colors of the year — neutrals in 2021 — persist until customers start seeing green show up all over their Pinterest or Instagram feeds or on their favorite HGTV show. Retailers need to be ahead of the trends in order to be prepared when customers, whether subliminally or consciously, demand green.

"There is value to color of the year," said Heidi Mortensen,

rose program manager for Star Roses and Plants and Bloomables brand manager.

"How quickly our industry responds to it is a different story. If someone is out shopping and sees peach rugs and pillows, they may naturally be more drawn to peach-colored flowers because they just bought peach for their décor. I personally think any color plays a huge role for us. We want to help retailers turn more inventory so we do a lot of match potting now to make plants stand out like red roses in red pots."

How green plays out in the garden center is endless. Lori Vollmer, co-owner of **Garden Fever** retail nursery in Northeast Portland with her husband, Richard, is adamant about the value of trend watching.

"Do I pay attention to color?" she said. "Absolutely. I start with Color of the Year and from there, look at clothing and then home décor, which has a direct link to nurseries."

Vollmer, like many Baby Boomers, flips through magazines like *Elle Décor* to follow trends, but Millennials are more likely to be clicked into the internet. Home shows and catalogs also help give Vollmer a strong grasp on color trends. You've got to keep your eyes open to everything, she said, so you can use your knowledge of trendy colors to merchandise inventory that people will be drawn to.

"Customers will tell you what they like," Vollmer said. "They either buy it



A Smith Gardens container uses *Heuchera 'Melting Fire'*, *Vinca 'Illumination'*, *Heuchera 'Plum Pudding'*, and *Imperata 'Red Baron'*

PHOTO COURTESY OF SMITH GARDENS

or they don't. Listen to that and don't let your personal favorites rule the roost, because you're here to meet the desires of customers."

Spotting and utilizing trends

Between labor challenges and supply chain problems, some retailers say they don't have time to be trend spotters. Dubow believes many want to know more. In her many presentations about trends, most in the audience are retailers. "You're coming to a trend talk, so you're interested," Dubow said. "You can become a trend spotter and a leader. Learn about trends, tell people about them and you become a trend spotter. Your customers trust you more. They look to you for leadership and it builds your brand overall."

How you go about becoming a trend spotter can be on a high level, such as how you merchandize, or a low level, such as writing a blog or a social media post, Dubow noted. Tell customers and potential customers that green is in the spotlight this year and give them ideas about how to use green.

For growers, color trends can be tough. Some turn inventory in a few months and can follow the trends, but they put their efforts where the money is.

"Plant breeders are dollar-wise," said Suzy Hancock, general manager of **Portland Nursery** in Northeast and Southeast Portland. "It takes a lot of money to bring a plant to market. Marketing departments pay a lot of attention

to color."

Mortensen of Star Roses and Plants, where plants can take up to 10–20 years to come to market, has a long-term vision of color trends. While she watches color trends, the nursery is more in tune with what colors are missing in their rose lines and what customers are demanding. Following last year's neutral trend, the big

color in roses right now is white, which follows the minimalistic, farmhouse design so prevalent in media outlets. But she predicts orange will be the next hot color, at least for Star Roses, which is working on an orange-colored rose for the Knock Out line.

"We have 240 roses, so we can use what we have to follow trends," Mortensen said. "We will deal with green by having our marketing department talk about the variety and usefulness of green foliage. There's a wide array of greens with different design solutions."

Trends don't come and go in a year and they overlap, so vigilance in following color trends

is necessary to keep customers engaged, according to Mullins.

"If you don't pay

attention to color, it could backfire," Mullins said. "You have to pay attention to what the customer wants. You don't want to stock shelves with colors that don't sell well. Watching your color directly affects sales. And it changes from year to year."

At Pepper Harrow Farm in Madison County, Iowa, color is everything. Owners Jenn and Adam O'Neal, authors of the new book "Small Farms, Big Dreams," pay close attention to trends. But because of their colorful business model, they don't limit themselves.

"We 100% pay attention to color," Jenn O'Neal said. "We design our growing year by color and seasonality. We are very color-trend-oriented at the farm. We call what we do 'design-driven' flower farming. We specifically plant what we do based on color."

What to do with the information

Like Mortensen, the O'Neals still see white as a trend. But they think green makes perfect sense and they've seen an uptick in sales of greenery. Brides are reaching out ➤



This container combo hits a variety of green shades with *Vinca 'Illumination'*, *Hosta 'Patriot'*, Makinoi's holly fern, Japanese painted fern, and *Ajuga 'Mahogany'*

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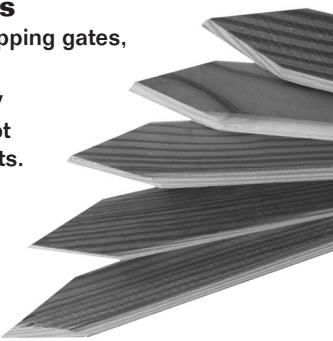
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for foliage-only arrangements, Jenn O'Neal said. And people went crazy for a recent greenery chandelier they made.

At Portland Nursery, planted containers and end-cap displays show combinations that customers can easily copy. The pot is as big a part of the presentation as the plants. They have to play together, Hancock said. For houseplants, neutral containers stand back so foliage is shown at its best.

"If you put combinations out there, it's like bam! You're helping customers and helping yourself," Hancock said.

Sometimes colors don't pan out, Vollmer said. She's made mistakes in color quality and texture because it's difficult to get a true representation of what the product looks and feels like in reality. It's also important to assess which shades do best in a certain area. The color palate in Palm Springs is quite different than the Pacific Northwest.

"You have to weed through and see what is appropriate for our neck of the woods," Vollmer said. "The Pacific Northwest is very on trend, but it's not the same as other places. I look for what customers are buying, what growers suggest and my own instinct; 75% of my choices are instinct. They have to tell a story. I want people to look at what we've done and say, 'Those combine beautifully.'"

Not everyone is on board with Color of the Year.

"One of the things we've been criticized for is 'what do they expect us to do with this,'" Dubow from Garden Media said. "We don't expect everyone to paint their houses green. We want retailers to know what people will be seeing. In general, consumers start seeing these colors in things like pillows and clothes and comforters. We should be stocking our shelves with some green. We don't think garden centers should change all their selection, but you could have displays to show off combinations." ☐

Kym Pokorny is a garden writer with more than 20 years' experience writing for The Oregonian (Portland, Oregon) and other publications. She is currently a communications specialist with Oregon State University Extension Service.