

# HOME & GARDEN

## SPRING EDITION

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WHAT'S INSIDE

# Flower landscaping's simple joys

BY LYNDA TWARDOWSKI  
Special to the Record-Eagle

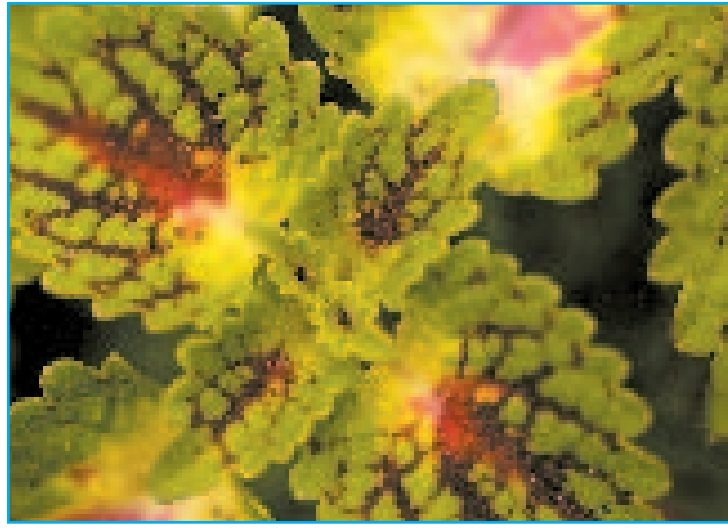
Mother Nature — a fashionista? Believe it. These days, home exteriors are showing as much style as their interiors, says Charlie Nardozi, horticulturist for the National Gardening Association. "People are looking at their garden as an extension of their home," he said. "It's become a personal expression of their own style."

Like any slave to style, gardens and landscapes are in step with the latest trends. This season's chic? Whether it's design, care or color, simplicity is the theme local garden and landscape retailers are seeing.

**Flower bed be gone**  
Nowhere is simplicity more apparent than in the clamor for containers. Second only to water gardening, container gardening is the fastest-growing trend in the nation and with an 18.7 percent annual growth rate over the last five years, one in every four gardeners rely on containers today, said Nardozi.

Carol Morris, co-owner of Breeze Hill in Traverse City, agrees. She says most of her customers are weekend gardeners or people who just want to dabble in the dirt a couple times a month, and containers are the natural choice for them.

Unlike yard garden beds, which can require heaps of effort all year round — think soil preparation, aeration, pH adjustment, pests and weeds wandering over a large area — containers can be loaded with suitable soil,



Record-Eagle/Lara Neel

Right, osteospermums, and above, coleus, on display at Breeze Hill Nursery's greenhouse in Traverse City.

moved whenever weather or whim dictates and because they're compact, easily tended.

When the season ends, containers can be moved inside or dumped out and put away for winter. Come spring, they're ready for new plantings.

Though a container's planting space is limited — and never should be overloaded — a pot doesn't need to be limited to one species, says Morris.

"You can make a combo of anything if you know the plants' growth habits," she said. "Get good advice on their sun, shade, soil and water needs and choose things that grow similarly."

Need advice on pots? Morris says plastic containers are hot sellers for good reason: They can be crafted to mimic the color and texture of terra cotta and concrete planters, but they're far lighter and better able to withstand northern Michigan's lake winds

because they hold moisture rather than wick it from the soil. To boot, plastic won't crack or break easily.

People partial to plants who thrive in damp soil may also want to consider lining their containers with something new that Plant Masters' manager Pamela Jo Mitchell expects to fly off the shelves this season: New Zealand sphagnum moss. Available in preformed baskets or free-form clumps, this moss retains 30 times its weight in water, Mitchell says.

If you'd prefer to go simpler still — and most of Plant Masters' customers do, says Mitchell — consider pick-and-go planters, container gardens of all sizes that are already planted with complementary flowers and foliage.

**For the masses**  
Massing, the planting of the same or similar plants or flowers, is a new design technique that's gaining ground in containers and



garden beds. Unlike the formerly fashionable and labor-intensive English garden style where a chaos of color and variety is key, massing relies on blocks of one color, usually varied by tone or texture.

"The English garden has lots of color and size and shapes. It's beautiful, and it jumps out at you, but it doesn't give the sense of peace and serenity that one color can," said Jeanine

Rubert, owner of Pine Hill Nursery in Traverse City. "With what's going on in our world, we want a calming presence when we go home."

Just because a garden is calm doesn't mean it can't be dramatic. Rubert says bold colors like reds, oranges or pinks are hugely popular and can still give a solid sense of order and simplicity.

**PLEASE SEE PAGE 9**

**Heavy metal:** Rustproof patio furniture

Page 3



**Bedtime story:** Mattress tells tale of sound sleep

Page 4

**Demolition:** Think first, then swing hammer

Page 5

**'Green built':** Trend is now a viable option

Page 6

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