

Business is blooming beautiful for Algarve's Q Gardens

Speaking to *The Portugal News*, Francisco Castel-Branco, Q Garden's managing director, takes a stroll down memory lane to explore the growth behind one of the Algarve's longest-established and best known gardening centres, and reveal the secrets behind its success.

Q Garden was established almost 20 years ago as a Garden Centre, to fill an existing gap in the market. It is a unique space where clients can walk around and enjoy the centre's astounding plant collection, whether just for the pleasure or for purchasing.

"Our mission is to meet the needs of our customers, garden owners, enthusiasts and landscapers, offering a wide range of vegetal specimens, garden utilities and related services", Mr. Castel-Branco explains, adding "customer's requirements will be met by our friendly, knowledgeable, professional and problem-solving oriented staff."

With a background in business administration, Mr. Castel-Branco understands the market and customers' needs. He believes a company is sustained by its workers and "if we are all committed to our mission statement and perform in accordance with our values

that will lead us where we want to go and be a better company.

"We have the products, the knowledge and the services which result in a value proposition for our customers. The garden enthusiasts know us", he says confidently.

Q Garden is best known for its massive assortment of plants. With more than 3,000 different types of plant in a variety of sizes and colours, Q Garden employees are renowned for

knowing everything about each and every species.

In addition there is a large range of complementary garden utilities like different types of soils, fertilizers, pots, furniture, shade solutions or artificial grass.

Q Garden further provides a range of gardening services, which Mr. Castel-Branco says the company

was "pushed in to."


"Our customers pushed us into the landscaping and maintenance services several years ago. We project and develop landscaping and irrigation works, from a small garden to a large property. We are properly equipped and we have the professionals to do it", he explains.

Working solely to satisfy even the most discerning customers' expectations, he adds: "Our purpose is to meet the customer's needs. You buy a container and need someone to do the planting? Then we will do it. You have a problem with your irrigation system? We'll fix it. You have pests or diseases in your garden? We'll treat it. We have the plants, we landscape and we maintain your garden."

After conducting in-house research Q Garden found their customer base could be divided into three distinct categories: garden owners and gardening enthusiasts, construction companies and the real estate developers, and the landscape

"The garden enthusiasts know us."

"We have the plants, we landscape and we maintain your garden."



We make a difference

- Garden Centre
- Landscaping
- Maintenance

- Irrigation systems
- Rustic walls
- Fences
- Artificial grass
- Soil covers and mulching
- Palm tree treatments
- Biological products
- Vegetables
- Furniture
- Pots and planters
- Aquatic plants
- Plant rental

E.N. 125 Odiáxere • LAGOS
 Tel.: +351 282 799 633 • Fax: +351 282 799 893
 www.qgardenpt.com
 email: qgarden@mail.telepac.pt



and maintenance companies.

For such, specific services have been tailored for each category.

"We have developed customer partnerships with builders and real estate promoters, who share the same values we do, and we give them exactly what they want. In the landscape and maintenance category we supply plants to companies and individual gardeners", Mr. Castel-Branco revealed, adding that while the landscape and maintenance segment can also be seen as competitors, they are firstly and foremost customers.

He says "Indeed they are our competitors in landscaping and maintenance but also our customers at the Garden Centre. We assist them to better their knowledge regarding plants and we offer the landscapers a 'plant list' service,

from which they can select any plants and trees they will need to landscape a garden. This way they don't have to worry in collecting plants from several suppliers as we can cover all their needs in a single order, at competitive prices. They can then have peace of mind knowing they will have their plants on time."

In keeping with modern times and the era of IT, Q Garden has introduced a new web page to offer an even better service to its clients.

Despite being present on the internet for many years, "our page was technologically behind the times and we needed a more flexible tool with which to communicate and interact with our customers and prospects", Mr Castel-Branco concluded, saying he hoped "the new page will help us to be closer to our customers."



Taking the designer catwalk to your garden

As the RHS Chelsea Flower Show approaches, award-winning contenders Bunny Guinness and Chris Beardshaw tell Hannah Stephenson about the design trends we're likely to see on the horticultural catwalk that may soon make their way to the domestic garden.

Visitors to the horticultural event of the year are likely to see more punchy colours, a push on ornamental fruit and veg and a continuing growth in native and naturalistic planting, experts are predicting.

The RHS Chelsea Flower Show is always a showcase for the most inspirational, out-of-this-world designs, but what can we take from the garden catwalk to the average domestic setting?

"There's always a danger that the show gardens become such grand statement pieces that you feel as though there's very little access in terms of the materials and the ideas you can take," says award-winning garden designer Chris Beardshaw, who this year is not only helping create the Bradstone Fusion Garden, an urban show garden, but is also a judge at Chelsea.

"However, there seems to be a number of clear directions - one is a celebration of plants in history, reflecting on the plants which have performed particularly well for us.

"There's a huge move towards native plants and naturalistic planting. It takes a while, when you think that Chelsea is at the high end of the fashion market, for things to become mainstream.

"We are looking at gardening in a very biodiverse way, thinking carefully about the plants we weave together and what effect they are going to have, not just on our senses but on all of the other organisms that we share our spaces with.

"You see plants growing in the way plants want to grow. It's

gardening for people who like the organisms around them to be as relaxed as they are."

Hot plants at Chelsea may include a clutch of interesting alpine plants such as meconopsis (blue poppies), along with quality herbaceous plants such as peonies and almost black bearded irises, while topiary plants (watch out for the Laurent Perrier garden) will also be popular.

"Large topiary plants are becoming more available and people are spending less on collections of plants and more on individual ones," Beardshaw observes.

"People are happy to spend £100 (£114.67) upwards on a single large specimen.

"We are no longer banging the drum of 'Plant it small and wait 50 years and it might turn into what you've anticipated'. By buying larger plants, there's an instantaneous reward that can be gleaned.

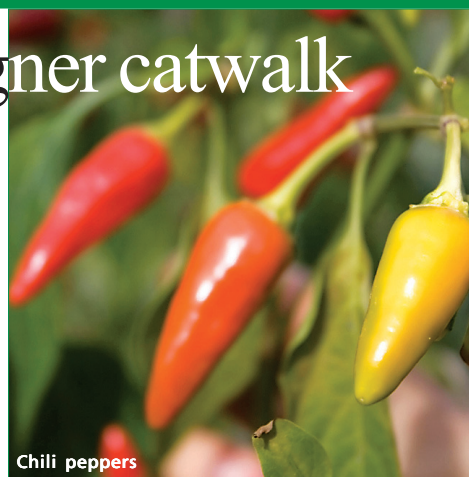
"B&Q and Homebase, both at Chelsea with show gardens, feel there's a market for increasing the public's awareness of plant materials.

"The idea of growing fruit and veg in baskets and boxes and up walls and fences has to come in through a more mainstream source.

"Expect new mechanisms for hanging baskets and irrigation, troughs and boxes, to come through those outlets."

Bunny Guinness, winner of six gold medals at the show and designer of the 2011 M&G garden, a modern take on a traditional kitchen garden, predicts that fruit and veg will be brought into the spotlight in domestic gardens.

In the show garden she's designed, cabbages and beans mingle with clematis and roses, while lavender and other herbs ensure the garden smells sweet



Chili peppers

and fragrant. Large terracotta pots containing lemon, apple and quince fruit trees are placed throughout the garden.

"Some people are still very reluctant to put vegetables into prime positions. In the old days, they were in the walled garden which was miles away from the house because people thought they didn't look particularly good.

"But I think the kitchen garden can look good all year round, anywhere that's highly convenient. I can't think of any vegetable that isn't ornamental when it's arranged well. Seeing any crop nicely grown, whether it's in lines or swirls or curves, looks lovely. Veg should be grown in high-profile places because they are high-profile things."

Black Italian kale, chillies, tomatoes, standard gooseberries and redcurrants all feature in

Guinness's show garden, providing colour and architectural interest. Raised beds should catch on because they're easier to tend and much more productive, she says.

While muted colours such as whites and blues have been the must-have colours of recent years, Guinness reckons there are going to be some dazzlers this year.

"I wouldn't be surprised if there weren't quite a few punchy colours because of the recession, to hot things up a bit and raise the temperature," she predicts. "I know there are reds in some of the structures."

The RHS Chelsea Flower Show, The Royal Hospital, London SW3, May 24-28 (May 24-25, RHS members only, May 26-28, RHS members and non-members). To book tickets and show information visit www.rhs.org.uk/chelsea.