

For immediate release

October 18, 2011

## On the Cusp of a Boom

Green industry is excited about business opportunities at Expo

Toronto (October 2011) —Despite the uncertainties of weather and increasing competition, there has never been a better time to be in the garden and landscape industry.

A very wet spring followed by one of the driest summers on record, combined with a concerted effort by big box and grocery stores to cut into the gardening and landscaping market, made for a challenging year. But there is a lot of opportunity ahead for the businesses of the green industry. As our world grows more hectic, more and more people are looking for an escape close to home, and it doesn't get much closer than in their own yards. Creating these outdoor living spaces has helped make gardening the number one hobby among homeowners. Garden centres are perfectly positioned to help people develop their own private backyard oasis.

"We are fortunate to be in the green industry," says Michael Van Dongen, chairman of the Landscape Ontario garden sector group. "Consumers, for good reasons, have become more 'green,' and thus have turned to their local garden centre, landscaper or nursery for green inspirations. Garden centres, landscapers and nurseries have generally been local due to the nature of our product, thus the recent push to buy local has reaffirmed our industry."

The numbers are certainly in favour of the green industry. It has been estimated that Baby Boomers will spend between \$7 billion and \$14 billion on gardening and garden-related activities in the next year, fuelling growth estimates of 17% over the next three years, and between 18-30% within the decade. This is impressive for an industry that already generates more than \$14 billion in economic activity and employs 132,000 people.

But that projected growth will only benefit the garden and landscape industry if the individual companies seize the opportunity presented to them and re-establish their presence in the market. Long gone are the days when three generations of ownership was enough to satisfy a loyal customer base. Today's consumer is different, is more transient and is expecting a little more from its retailers.

Which is why building a brand is so important for garden centres and landscapers.

"The garden industry needs to align with the public to let them know that gardens can provide a lot of satisfaction by increasing their outdoor living space, improve the environment we live in, and also have a great deal of financial benefit," says Van Dongen.

A company's brand is its face to the world and will enhance any marketing efforts undertaken to promote products and services. Garden centres can build their brand by aligning with like-minded partners for local events, giving back to the community and creating experiences for customers. Building a brand also goes online, where more and more customers are turning. Recent studies have found nearly nine out of 10 consumers start their shopping online, where they seek a connection to retailers through social media channels.

Kicking off Expo 2011 on October 19th, Sheridan Nurseries president Karl Stensson will share tips and pointers for building the brand of a garden centre by enhancing the shopping experience within. His keynote address will discuss making a good first impression with a store's 'guests', the importance of the way plants and products are displayed, how to improve traffic flow through the garden centre and how to offer exceptional 'guest' service.

"Simply put, Expo is a showcase for the green industry, period," says Van Dongen. "It not only showcases the newest products and plants that are available, but it innovates with new technologies available for operations and production. Additionally, there are many educational components that allow members of the green community to network and learn together of what is to come."

The registration fee for Karl Stensson's presentation includes breakfast and an EXPO 2011 trade show badge. The Awards of Excellence Ceremony for the Garden Centre and Grower Programs, held during breakfast, is included. Tickets for Taking a Good Garden Centre and Making it GREAT are \$65 for Landscape Ontario members; \$85 for non-members. Retail owner/operators, retail store sales and customer service personnel will gain insights from the presentation.

For industry professionals interested in the Expo 2011 trade show only, the registration fees for Landscape Ontario members are \$15 and \$20 for non-members. Delegates may register or get more information on line at [www.loexpo.ca](http://www.loexpo.ca).

About EXPO 2011, Landscape Ontario and strategic partners:

EXPO 2011 is Canada's fall show for the floral and garden industry. Over 3,000 buyers will attend the expo, which showcases new products, recent plant and floral introductions and product demonstrations. Information is available at <http://www.loexpo.ca>