

PROTEAS: ALIEN ALLURE

If fashion's any indication, consumers have gone giddy for the exotic look. Nary a designer, from Michael Kors to Jenna Lyons (the visionary behind J. Crew), has overlooked the trend, incorporating vibrant shades of red, orange and green into their summer and fall lines, along with the Indonesian-based Ikat motif.

Want to feed the cultural craving for anything striking, with a slightly alien feel? Reach for proteas. "They're so out of this world looking," said J Schwanke, AAF, AIFD, PFCI. A fan of proteas partially because "they last and last and last," the host of JTV at uBloom.com praises their brilliant colors and interesting textures, as well. "Sneaking them into an arrangement, wreath or hand-tied bouquet gets the party started," he said.

Proteaceae, a giant family (about 80 genera with 1,600 species) "with a wide range of physical attributes," offers a bevy of design applications, said Vista, Calif.-based designer, educator and author René van Rems, AIFD. Among his favorite applications: one or two proteas in a clean cylinder container with some bear grass or curly willow; a monobotanical bouquet of *Leucospermum* (pinchusion proteas), with a collar of ribbons; in a centerpiece, paired with tropical flowers and orchids. Easy to pull apart, "proteas are sculptural and great for making arrangements funky," he said.

Best of all, "proteas have nine lives," van Rems said. Used fresh, their color is their dominant trait, but over time, even months, their texture "really starts to show." So if you don't sell them fresh, "just let them dry, spray them gold and sell them for Christmas," he said.

Show customers you're on the fashion forefront by adding these captivating cultivars to your inventory. 🌿



RAINBOW PROTEA

Because of its flattish center, **Protea king 'Red Rex'** should be used low in an arrangement, said Sylvia Bird, AAF, AIFD, PFCI. The Fort Myers, Fla., designer advised using it as a focal point with tropical flowers, such as strelitzia, ginger and heliconia, adding height.



MAUI FLORAL

Although typically paired with only tropical flowers, proteas, particularly pinchusions, such as **Leucospermum hybrid 'Apricot Brandy'**, "blend well with garden flowers and are at home in a lot of different types of designs," said BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD. The owner of Bouquets in Denver and two-time Floral Management Marketer of the Year winner recommends incorporating them in Asian-influenced arrangements and "wildflower" designs.

RESENDIZ BROTHERS



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Protea nerifolia 'Green Ice' charmed Bird with its "classy" aesthetic. She recommends using them recessed (cut low) in table designs for a black-tie function: "They give the impression of being really expensive," she said. This variety's also appealing for the many people "who like to have just green and white flowers," she said.

A sleek black container would emphasize **Protea 'Rose Mink's'** onyx edging, said Walter Fedyshyn, AIFD, PFCL. The creative design manager at Phillip's Flowers in Chicago recommends adding mahogany-colored ti leaves and fiddlehead fern curls to play up the protea's exotic look, thick pieces of manzanita branches and dark lotus pods for extra texture and, for a little whimsy, some black feathers.

While stunning all by itself, **Protea 'Aristata'** mixes extremely well with other flowers, said Carol Caggiano, AIFD, PFCL. "Roses and hydrangeas will lead them toward the romantic look," while pairing the proteas with tropicals, such as anthurium, ginger and heliconia, makes a more dramatic statement, the Jeffersonsont, Va., designer said. "In both cases, great foliage like aralia, monstera, aspidistra and ti make it all work!"

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"Just think of all the designs that need pink flowers," from newborn baby arrangements to breast cancer fundraisers, Bird said of **Protea compacta x burchellii 'Brenda's'** versatility. Bird described this hot-pink stunner with a "soft and fluffy" appearance as the perfect addition for monochromatic designs or arrangements with purple flowers or eucalyptus. "This would give great impact in the center of a design," she said. Fedyshyn also honed in on 'Brenda's' rosy coloring. "I would definitely want to accentuate them with other pink flowers," he said, suggesting a pairing with hot pink 'Ravel' roses, accented with white dendrobium orchids "to pick up the protea's white tips." "The feminine shades and daring look of the protea is perfect for a woman who likes trendy styles," he said. Play up the exotic feel with tropicals, such as monstera, dracaena or variegated ti leaves with deep pink or red markings.

Minks, such as **Protea nerifolia 'Van Rooys'**, have large flower heads, which Dyer likes to use in large arrangements for events "to encourage people to reach out and touch the feathery softness of their bracts," he said. Karen Fountain, AAF, finds them fetching for any "high style" arrangement. The owner of Flowers 'n' Ferns in Burke, Va., uses them as focal flowers, accented by anthurium, Birds of Paradise and a variety of greenery. "They're also great for funeral tributes, especially when you want a masculine look," she said.

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