

Acres Online

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February 9, 2005

Recognize tomorrow's leaders today

There's still time (but not much) to nominate your favorite young grower for *GrowerTalks*' first annual Young Grower Award. We want to recognize and reward the industry's rising stars—those bright, promising, under-35 growers who are already making a difference in your greenhouses through their skill, enthusiasm, integrity and leadership. If you know of a grower who fits that bill, nominate them today! You can find an application in the January *GrowerTalks*. Or go online to www.growertalks.com/younggroweraward to download an application. Five finalists will be featured in an upcoming issue of *GrowerTalks*. Plus, we'll fly them to the OFA Short Course in July, where they'll receive special gifts and have dinner with the *GrowerTalks* editorial staff. The Grand Prize winner will be announced at a special event during the Short Course.

The best event you never heard of

Two weeks ago I spoke at an event called the Garden Center Symposium, held in Waukesha, Wisconsin, just outside of Milwaukee. If you've never heard of GCS, don't feel bad—neither had I. Then I learned that the event is celebrating its 41st year! It's put on by Wisconsin and Northern Illinois garden centers who create a board just for this event. There's no association or organization involved. Yet it's a great two-day symposium for retailers, with a host of speakers on a wide range of topics, plus a 50-booth tradeshow.

I'm proud to say that two of the event's seven speakers were *GrowerTalks* and *Green Profit* regular contributors Stephanie Cohen and John Friel, who entertained, educated and enlightened the audience of 200 or so businesspeople and their employees. Steph spoke on "Cutting-Edge Perennials—No Bandaged Provided" and Friel's topic was "Having a Wonderful Time: Postcards from the Industry's Fringes." Both were hilarious and educational—a perfect combination.

If you're a retailer, consider checking out the 42nd annual Garden Center Symposium.

What's the buzz? "Hiving"

The GCS asked me to speak on "Tracking the Hot Trends." One of the more interesting trends I've uncovered lately is a change from "cocooning" or "nesting" to "hiving." What's hiving? Well, it's using the home as a base of operations—a hive, if you will. Think home office, home theatre and massive commercial kitchen entertainment area, plus outdoor rooms in which to play and relax.

Another trend I've noticed is how often our products are used to sell other industry's products. Next time you get a Crate & Barrel, Pottery Barn or any other home décor catalog in the mail, notice how nearly every photograph includes flowers or plants. Flowers and plants are the icing on the home décor cake. Are we capitalizing on that?

A first attempt at pot labeling

I've been on the lookout for examples of labeling that complies with the container labeling laws. Thus far this season I've only spotted one attempt, on potted bulbs at a local grocery store. The product description read "Iris/Mylar" (Mylar being the material that the pot cover was made of), which is as uninspired a description as I've ever heard, but at least it's in compliance with the law. Next, the volume of the container was described thusly:

Pot size: O.D. 4.000"/10.16 cm

I.D. 3.818"/9.7 cm

Pot height: 3.412"/8.67 cm

Soil volume: 28 cu in/459 cu cm

The pot size listing doesn't meet the law because if you're going to give dimensions, you need diameter of the top *and* the bottom, plus the height. The volume measurement given is within the spirit of the law, although the industry task force recommends using liquid measurement (liquid ounces and milliliters).

Alas, there was no declaration of responsibility (the third required bit of info) listed on the pot.

I'll keep looking for and sharing examples that might help you in your own labeling efforts.

AIB: It's like free publicity

Everybody in this business wants publicity, and the freer, the better, right? Then why the heck haven't you signed up your town for America In Bloom 2005? You have until February 28. Our little town of Batavia competed twice, winning in its second year. The publicity opportunities abounded. (Not that we capitalized on them—for instance, why didn't you guys at Shady Hill Gardens call one of the big Chicago television stations to come out and do a weather report or something?) But still, it was great for the town and for the organizations that participated. Go to www.americainbloom.org for more.

Pack Trial planning online

Want an easy way to plan your California Pack Trial visits? Go to www.growertalks.com and click on the Pack Trials link. There you'll find every trial's schedule and contact information, along with links to the person responsible for making visit reservations—just click and e-mail them.

Pay by Scan: Are you ready?

I hope that everyone who'll be selling to Kmart and Home Depot under pay by scan will succeed. (There's a rumor going around that Lowe's may follow suit, but my sources say no, Lowe's is against the idea ... at least for now). But based on early spring product sightings, some growers better be glad they're not working under pay by scan yet. One store I visited on Sunday had a nearly full rack (630 pots) of primula, priced at just 99 cents each. I'm sure the plants were great when they arrived, but lack of light and water meant that in just a few days most were chlorotic and dying. Sell-through was probably 10% at best. Under pay by scan, that rack would have grossed a whopping \$63.

At the same store I spotted a good attempt at upgrading some 5-in. gerbera by putting them in trendy translucent bags and painted metal buckets. Price was a healthy \$4.99, for which I give the grower and the chain major kudos. Unfortunately, the price was all that was healthy—the gerbera were dried out, with little evidence of sell-through.

Just for fun, I bought one of each anyway. I wondered if the cashier would offer any suggestions for a better purchase. Nope. She rang up two dead plants without raising an eyebrow.

Which I guess shows consistency: Ignore the plants; ignore the plant customers, too.

See you next time,
Chris

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