

Features

8/25/2011

Containers: Friendly Combat

Ellen C. Wells

What do you do when you have 100-plus garden center industry members on tour buses for three June days in hot-and-sticky New Jersey? You let them work their creativity, get their hands dirty, and have some fun while vying for bragging rights in the Container Gardening Challenge, sponsored by Ball Seed. And then you finish it off with ice cream, of course.



Taking first place and bragging rights to the first-ever GCA Container Gardening Challenge are Richard Rouser of Donzell's Garden Center, Akron, Ohio, and Chris Sexton of Fafard/Syngenta.

Coming in second place with a beautiful blue container as bright as their smiles are Jesus Chico and Ana Luz of Olea Viveros, Eagle Pass, Texas.

The Marks team—Mark Bigej of Al's Garden Center, Woodburn, Oregon, and Mark Highland of Organic Mechanics—took home third place, thanks to the help of their buggy friend.

According to Shanan Molnar of the Garden Centers of America, GCA president Dave Williams of Williams Nursery in Westfield, New Jersey, suggested incorporating group interaction into this summer's tour. On last fall's International Garden Centre Association (IGCA) tour, the group participated in several hands-on competitions that they still talk about today.

The GCA planning committee took the interaction one step further. If a container gardening challenge it is, why not auction off the containers afterward, with proceeds going to a local non-profit? It'll generate local

press and give his customers another reason to visit the store.

With generous donations of plant materials and soil from Ball Seed and Fafard/Syngenta, garden center owners, managers and allied trade members got a chance to prove they have more talent than balancing their ledgers. As you can see, they all certainly still have an eye for great container design.

Inspired Contest Idea

Have your own Container Gardening Competition!

- Gather a group of local celebrities: town/city officials, newscasters, local school teams, etc.
- Secure donations of plants, soil and pottery—or use items you're long on in stock
- Call in the local press and home/garden bloggers
- Inform customers via signage, e-newsletters, social media, etc.
- Make it fun—call in the local ice cream truck!