Loads of Ideas from the Sunshine State



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Baby, it's cold outside!



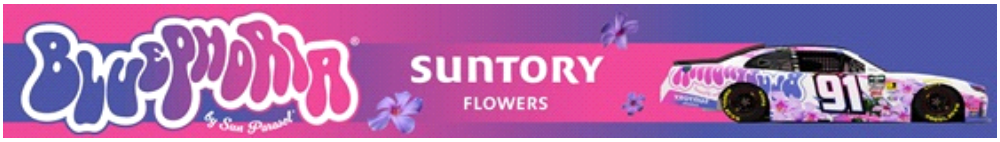







Lest you think I'm only in Florida to escape the cold in Chicago, let me tell you that I came to the Sunshine State during one of the biggest cold snaps seen in quite a while. Everybody has their winter coats out of mothballs—even the dogs—with temperatures in Apopka hitting the 20s and north Florida dipping to the teens. Broward County, where Ft. Lauderdale and TPIE are located, declared a cold emergency when temps dipped into the 40s—15 degrees below normal. At least it's not snowing.

But fear not: I've got some hot ideas from my week of travel. Read on to see what I've seen.



Three ideas for garden centers

We (my wife, Laurie, and I) spent the weekend in idyllic Mt. Dora, above Apopka. Quaint! Nearby is Renninger's Vintage Antique Center/Farmer's & Flea Market, which is a must-see along Highway 441. That's where I spotted this pallet-turned-wine rack:



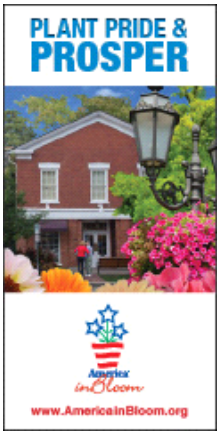
Down in Delray Beach, we found a quirky urban retailer called Johnny Mango's, a "Key West-style artsy store" as they call themselves. Tons of color from orchids, bromeliads and Mexican pottery and loads of texture from tropical plants—it's the sort of open-air place you only find in a warm climate of Florida or southern California.

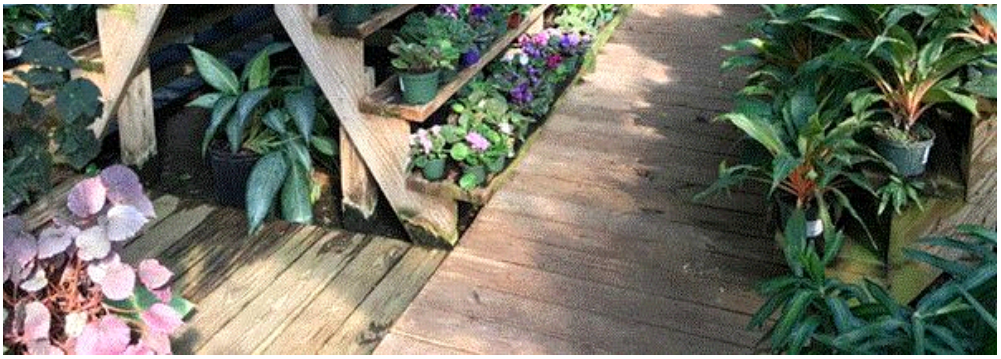
What I really liked was how they packed the product in on these stair-stepped wooden benches. I liked the board walkways, too, which added to the lush, jungle atmosphere.





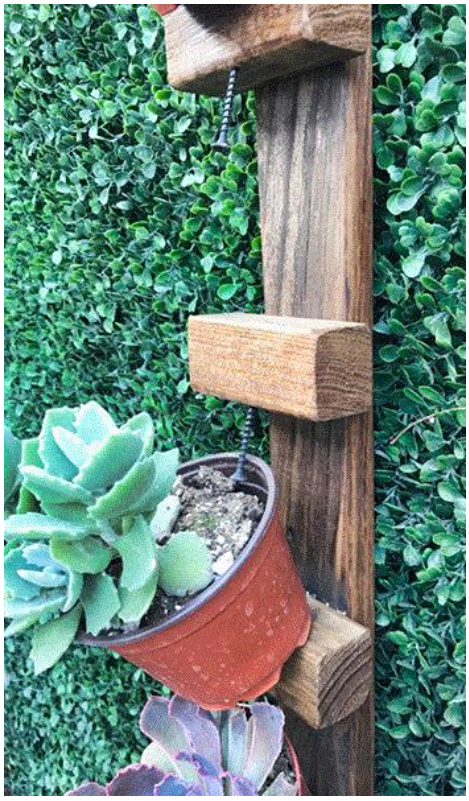






The third idea comes from Isaac Farms, a retailer on Krome Avenue, the main north-south drag through the growing area of Homestead. It's a simple way to hang pots on a wall using boards and screws. You can easily adapt it to any configuration you might dream up.







Highlights from Costa Farms

I was in Homestead primarily to visit the Season Premier Trial at Costa Farms' Color location. It's the first chance of the season to see some of the new bedding plants that will debut at the upcoming Spring Trials in April, along with some new and existing annuals in the ground in South Florida. Justin Hancock was our tour guide. Justin is in his fifth year with Costa, coming to them from a stint with *Better Homes and Gardens* in Des Moines, Iowa.

Justin told us that Costa didn't add any new features this year, as they were busy rebuilding sections of the nursery hit by Hurricane Irma in September. Also, this year they will not plant a summer trial. Instead, they'll leave in the Season Premier Trial and see what happens when it gets hot. That should be interesting!

I spotted several unfamiliar annuals in the ground that I suspect will be introduced at Spring Trials in April for the 2019 season, including:

- The **Tattoo series** of vinca from PanAmerican Seed. Tattoo features a dark eye instead of a white eye, along with some interesting flower color patterns (which were more noticeable in the greenhouse in Australia than in the full sun of Florida).



- A viola series called **Deltini** from Syngenta. There were six colors in the trial, and they all looked nice and uniform. A quick Google search reveals mentions of this F1 series going back as far as 2011 in Europe, but we haven't had Deltini here, just Endurio and Penny (from Goldsmith).



- Selecta One adds **Headliner Starry Sky Burgundy** to Pink Sky and Night Sky. It showed a smattering of small white dots that contrasted well against the deep burgundy color.



- **Paprika** and **Amber Gold** are new calibrachoa-inspired colors in the SuperCal Premium

series, which is bred by Sakata.



- Not new, but interesting, was seeing Proven Winners' **thunbergia Lemon-A-Peel** and **Orange A-Peel** planted in the ground, but with their pot trellises left in, which resulted in an interesting mounding effect.





Over at Costa's Headquarters

Costa is primarily known for foliage, and we saw plenty of it at their headquarters, just a few miles away from Costa Color, where Mike Rimland, head of R&D, gave us the tour.

Expect loads of colorful aglaonemas in the coming years. New introductions include Snow Storm, Lemonade and Cherries Jubilee. Several were in the New Products display over at TPIE.



Especially striking was this black-foliaged ZZ plant (zamioculcas) called Raven. From Asia, Raven first puts up green shoots, which turn almost jet black as they mature. The color has nothing to do with high light, so expect it to stay black even indoors.



Here's Raven alongside a traditional green ZZ.



Forget generations, think tribes

TPIE keynote speaker Max Luthy of Trendwatching.com was absolutely fascinating! He gave the standing-room-only audience five big consumer trends to pay attention to.



One big one: “post-demographic consumerism.” Which means forget making assumptions about customers based on when they were born. That’s because of urbanization and “the global brain” as he calls it—more than half the world being connected to the internet, which breaks down age barriers. So instead of categorizing customers by the generation they were born into (Boomers, Gen-X, Millennials), today it makes more sense to organize customers by “tribe”—which is shared passions, pursuits or interests; for instance, perennial geeks, animal lovers, makers, music lovers, yogis, foodies, skateboarders or writers who like to garden, play drums and weld.

That said, Max also was the first I’ve heard to put a name to the generation that will come after the Millennials: they will be the Centennials, he says.

There was much more good stuff from his talk that the floriculture industry is “well-placed” to take advantage of, he says, including “ambient wellness,” which is where our surroundings are supposed to improve our health; and “polarized modernity,” in which people are seeking to know more about their inner selves and their histories (think about the popularity of gene tests like 23andMe and Ancestry).



On the show floor

2018 seems to be off to a positive start, based on the mood here and at last week’s MANTS show in Baltimore. Good crowds, money to spend after a solid 2017, deals being made, and, in Florida, little talk of the hurricane that hit four months ago. In fact, the “let’s get busy and rebuild—and make improvements when we do” attitude is almost palpable. Only a few growers cancelled their booths at TPIE due to storm damage and lack of product. More proof that growers are by nature the most resilient and optimistic folks I know.

Still, the rebuilding process in South Florida is taking time. I talked to one shadecloth manufacturer who said they had just finished up shipping their September orders and were now working on October … and this was on January 18! They had nearly doubled staff and were working two shifts to meet demand, which, state-wide, has to be thousands of acres of shade fabric.

Beyond that, the pain point for all growers in 2018 seems to be labor cost and availability—or more accurately, lack of availability. It’s just plain hard to find people who want to work in agriculture, at any price.



Just what the Dr. ordered for Christmas

I’m still sorting through what I’ve seen on the show floor, but my pick item thus far is one you can think about for next Christmas: the “Whooville” lemon cypress from Coastal Nursery of Watsonville, California. If you search #grumptree on Instagram, you’ll find 941 people who have posted their picture with one. A fun item!



The next “it” plant

If you don’t know *Pilea peperomioides* yet, don’t worry, you will. Everybody is talking about it on social media, yet the industry has only now discovered this odd-but-engaging little foliage plant. At first glance, you’d swear it was some form of peperomias—like a watermelon plant but with no stripes. But nope, it’s a pilea. Costa has it, and so does Harster Greenhouses in Canada, and one other exhibitor at TPIE (whose name escapes me, sorry!)



Andre Harster himself showed it to me at his booth. I asked him where it came from and he told me a missionary of some form brought it from China back to Norway in the 1940s. Supposedly, it was traded and collected by plant geeks (it sends up loads of baby plants that are easy to propagate), but pros who saw it turned their noses up at it. Yet it’s being eaten up by plant fans, who are paying $55 plus shipping for a 4-in. pot on Amazon.

Common names include Pancake Plant, The Sharing Plant and Chinese Money Plant.

Best in Show

I had the pleasure of presenting the Best in Show booth award to Bullis Bromeliads for this 10 x 20 endcap.



I wasn't one of the judges, but I can see why they appreciated the great use of the nursery's products, in a modern design aesthetic. I especially like the illuminated sign with the illuminated specimen bromeliads on either side.



The CC Rack Build King: Ben Eagle

The Fifth Annual CC Rack Build Competition was again held on TPIE's Create Stage, where four competitors battled to see who could assemble a three-shelf CC rack in the shortest time. They had three rounds in front of an adult beverage-infused crowd, so it was a fun time. It was especially fun for Ben Eagle of Welby Gardens, who came out on top with a best time of 25.02 seconds, narrowly beating Juan Corro of McCorkle Nurseries, who managed 25.60. Ben won $1000 for his victory.



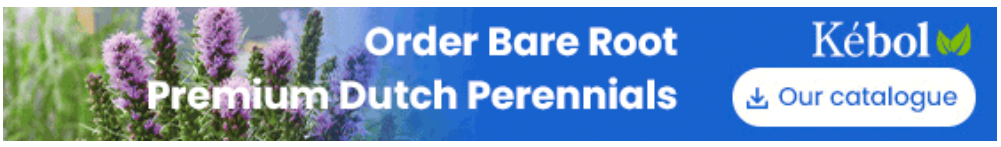
Ben, on his way to victory.

Oh, I asked CC's Sonny Costin if we'll ever see an international championship—our best against Europe's best—and he said he's working on it! Go Team USA!



Where's Chris off to next?

No rest for the wicked, as they say: I get one day back home before heading over to cover IPM Essen in Essen, Germany, to do more of the same: seeking out cool new products, emerging trends and eye-catching marketing ideas that you can put to work in your business. Stay tuned!



See you next time!



Chris Beytes
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