

Cover Story

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Faves From Florida

Chris Beytes & Ellen C. Wells

If you're looking for fun, sun and tropical foliage, the 40th annual Tropical Plant International Expo (TPIE) held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, this past January met at least two of those this year. (Fun fact: The temperature dipped down around 40F, causing iguanas to fall from trees!)

If the best companies inspire trends, then the Broward County Convention Center was packed with them. Inspiration was everywhere. The items on these pages, favorites of the Green Profit/GrowerTalks editors in attendance, are just the tip of the TPIE iceberg (it was that chilly!).

Year of the Aroid

Or so it seems. Aroid Greenhouses (a startup by Paula Amezcuita, whose dad, Edgar, has been a Florida nurseryman for 20 years) may have gotten it most spot-on when it comes to capitalizing on the craze for monstera, swiss cheese philodendron (*P. adansonii*), brightly colored aglaonemas and all the other Instagram hotties. An aroid (*M. deliciosa* Thai Constellation from Costa Farms) captured the Favorite New Foliage Plant Award. We saw green monstera at Alpha Botanicals and Deroose Plants, and swiss cheese and *Alocasia odora* Variegata at Excelsa Gardens (a Garden Center Group Cool Product winner). The best news is, despite some big growers getting into these trendy plants, availability is still tight, which means demand—and prices—should stay high.



Left to right: Aroid Greenhouses showed off their cool plant truck, which they park at South Florida markets. • Thai Constellation—not a new variety, but it's new to TPIE. * Aglaonema SRA from Costa Farms earned a Cool Product ribbon.

E-commerce Packaging from A-Roo

We heard from several exhibitors that there were quite a few e-commerce plant seller startups working the aisles of TPIE to source material—which is good for growers (if not concerning for retailers). With that in mind, it's handy that A-Roo Company was exhibiting their new line of e-commerce mail packs, blisters and shippers, designed to protect plants during the shipping process. They come in a range of sizes and configurations to accommodate most any plant, from liners to large finished specimens. TPIE attendees gave it a Favorite New Product award. www.a-roo.com

Kazumi Kokedama

We wanted to put this little business on your radar because it's a fun story: visiting her daughter in Japan, Mercedes Manosalva Gereda discovered Kokedama, which is the gardening art of creating a moss ball to contain a plant's roots. She brought her new hobby back to her Florida home, where her son, Edgardo, an accountant, said, "Mom, I think you could sell those things." The result is Kazumi Garden, a backyard business that could rapidly take off.

The proof? First, these are the prettiest Kokedamas we've seen. And second: This was their first industry trade show and they've already won a Garden Center Group Cool Product Award AND a second place in the 10 x 10 booth category! (We also love their logo, which is based on a small Japanese doll daughter gave to mom.)

www.kazumigarden.com



Left to right: Packaging from A-Roo. • Kazumi Kokedama booth. • Edgardo Manosalva from Kazumi Garden.



Cheers!

No, we're not celebrating. That "Cheers" is literally the name of a mini terrarium-type product from Gail Cash at Flori-Design. The wine bottle-turned-terrarium not only caught my eye as a fun and truly unique planter, it also caught the eye of the judges walking the TPIE floor as it won one of The Garden Center Group-sponsored Cool New Product Awards. The wine bottle is a two-tiered terrarium with the bottom portion closed off by the top portion. The bottle is open at the top, but a cork could easily close it off.

Flori-Design also received a Cool New Product Award for its battery-powered lantern planter, which has a light in the top and a carry handle.

Pictured: Flori-Design's Cheers Mini Garden Wine Bottle and Lighted Mini Garden Lantern.

Haute Terra Cotta

Houseplants abounded at TPIE, but unless you're in a 365-day tropical environment, you'll need a pot to put them in. And pots were plentiful, indeed, in all sorts of materials—natural fiber and pulp, ceramic and so forth. It was nice to see terra cotta making a classy comeback in the form of the Free-Form Artisan Collection from The Urban Jungle, a sister company of LiveTrends Design Group, another company known for classy containers.

The hand-turned-looking terra cotta pots—and the entire brand, really—revolves around the message, “plants for mindful living.” LiveTrends’ Bisser Georgiev told us the line’s goal is to simply make a person feel soothed and calm. But it made the judges excited enough to give the line a Cool New Product Award.



Pictured left to right: The Urban Jungle's Free-Form Artisan Collection. • The Urban Jungle's Boho and Mishima collections. • Terra cotta pots from Big Grass.

The Urban Jungle has more than just one line of terra cotta, of course. The Boho and Mishima Collections include terra cotta pots with white-detailed patterning, two sizes in each collection. It's beautiful pottery that aims to highlight the plants.

Also big into terra cotta is Big Grass. If you're looking for unusually shaped terra cotta pots, Big Grass is your go-to. New to their line is a star-shaped form. They have so many containers that are just so decorative, you don't even need to put a plant in them.

Orchids All Over

While Chris Beytes may have thought aroids stole the show, I noticed just how many booths were hawking orchids. I counted eight booths within the first two or three aisles. Westerlay Orchids out of Carpinteria, California, had three new product lines that caught my attention.

A new form. Westerlay is training phalaenopsis branches around a cylinder or tube-shaped mold so the branches loop around. This Brambles line is somewhat shorter in stature than a regularly staked or cascading-type orchid.



Left to right: Brambles add a fun and free-form nature to the phalaenopsis market. • Westerlay's Locally Grown line includes a foliage item and is available in a limited range. • Westerlay's Gemstone line of two-toned orchids.

The Locally Grown line. These are phals that are planted with foliage plants grown exclusively by Por La Mar Nursery in Santa Barbara and are available “locally”—California, Arizona and Nevada. “Local” is top of mind for shoppers nowadays.

Different colors. Westerlay's Gemstones are phals that are dyed with one color, giving them that two-colored look. Moonstones have two dyes, giving them three colors in all.

Important Notes:

You can find more winter trade show coverage on the flip side in *GrowerTalks*, including highlights from IPM Essen and MANTS.

Don't forget to mark your calendars for next year's TPIE show January 20-22 in Tampa, Florida. That's right, the show will be in Tampa for two years while the Broward County Convention Center gets a makeover.