Greetings from BC, plus Czechia, seasonal pots and win an iPad



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Green Profit's buzz

Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

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Greetings from BC!

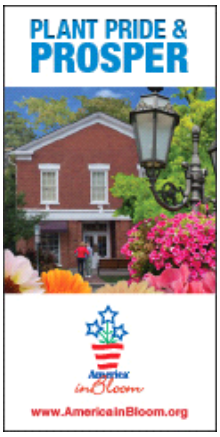
I'll be in a plane somewhere over the great country of Canada when you read this, but as I type I am in Abbotsford, British Columbia, preparing to speak at the 2018 CanWest Horticulture Expo. It's my first time in Canada, if you can believe it. Had to fly all the way to the West Coast in order to make that happen rather than drive four to five hours north of my Boston home. I'm told by the locals that this side of the country is the better side anyway.

Other than speakers, there is also a trade show going on here, so I walked the aisles to spot any new items among the nursery and landscape products for you, my garden retailer readers. Here are the two I got the scoop on:

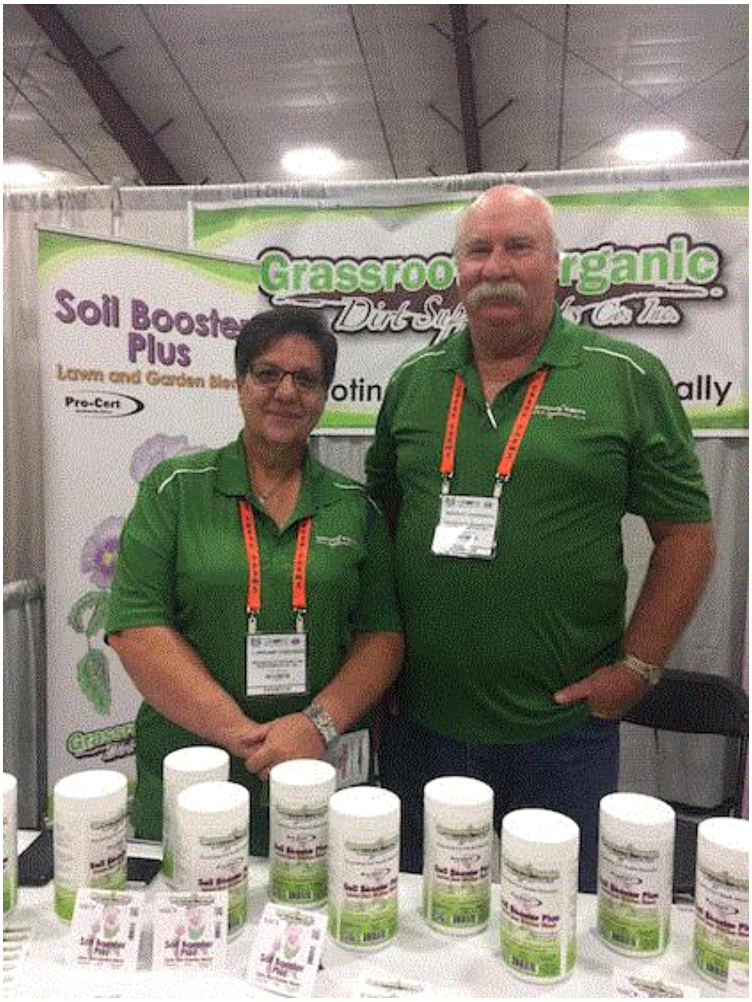
Soil Booster Plus from Grassroots Organic Dirt Supplements. Owner Murray Cheesman (pictured below with wife Lorraine) explains that Soil Booster Plus is filled with humates that are activated by a product they ship in from Switzerland which, along with the soil's







biology, breaks the humates down into 70-plus different trace elements. It's Pro-Cert certified and 100% natural.



Rep Mark Handfield told me he used it on his tomatoes this year and the tomatoes were not only significantly larger but also tasted way better. Murray and wife Lorraine say it's all those trace minerals. Started in 2016, Grassroots Organic is looking to get into some U.S. locations. Could that be you? www.grosupplements.ca.



Dragon's Den

That's the Canadian version of Shark Tank, and my next product was actually pitched on the show. Jennifer Pratt pitched her Seeding Square just a little while ago, and while she can't tell me what her results were, she did tell me all about the product.



The Seeding Square is a square template with color-coded holes. Each of the four colors corresponds to spacing you'd have for certain types of seeds; closer spacing for lettuce seeds, further spacing for peppers, for example. A wand acts both as a hole depth measurer and as a scoop to transfer seeds from a packet to the hole. A funnel of sorts also comes with the Seeding Square and attaches to each template hole so one doesn't spill the seeds haphazardly and into other holes (great idea!). And with the imprint of the template on the garden's soil, you can line up your rows and use your garden space efficiently. Again, Jennifer is trying to get into the U.S. market. Find out more about the Seeding Square at www.seedingsquare.ca.

Oh! And I also spotted Amanda Bruce, this year's Dümmen Orange/*Green Profit* Young Retailer Award winner. Her family's nursery, Cedar Rim, is in nearby Langley. She was in her element at the show!

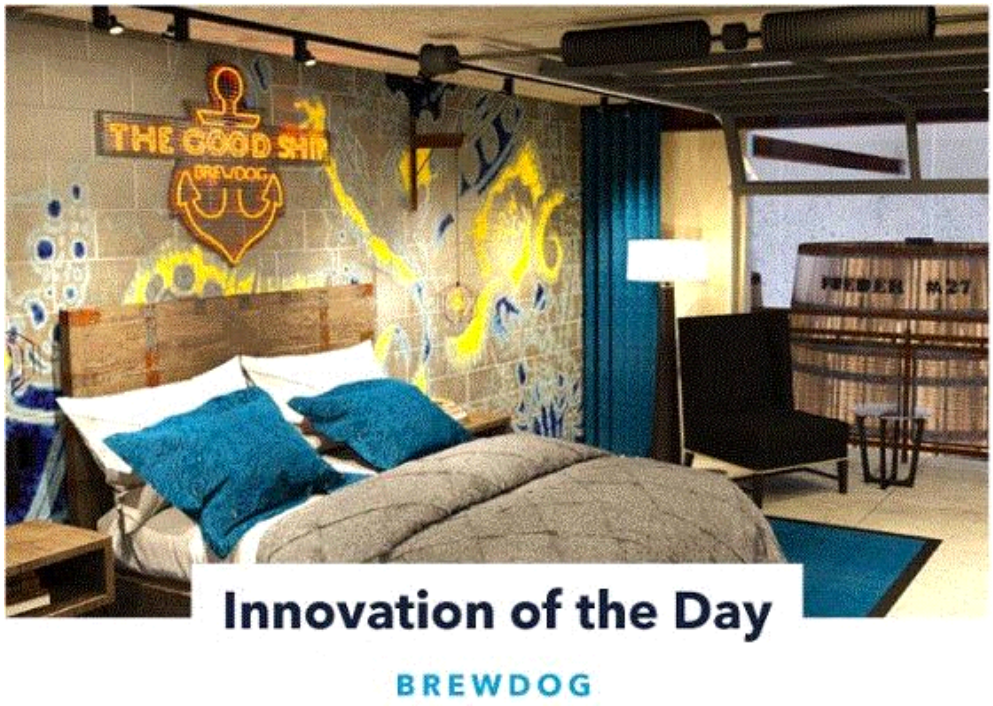


What'd I Talk About?

My talk at CanWest was entitled "Trends: What Aren't You Paying Attention To?" I'll share an item from it so you don't feel left out.

The first is a place called The Dog House, and for those of you who plan to attend Cultivate,

you should consider staying at this new 32-room hotel on the outskirts of Columbus, Ohio. It's a hotel that is right next door to The Brew Dog, which is the first American outpost of a Scottish brewery of the same name (I actually had dinner there last July).



The Dog House is a publicity stunt of sorts. The hotel has an interactive beer museum, games like beer pong, beer-infused spa treatments and access to limited-edition beers from the brewery. Each meal includes beer pairings (even breakfast!) and each room has a beer tap and in-shower minibar next door. Room rates are $150/night, but for just $1,850 more per night, you can have an en suite hot tub filled with IPA.

Okay. Wow. That is totally over the top! What's the point in relating something that is so off the wall? Well, how far can you take your own publicity stunt? What can you offer at *your business* that is at an equivalent outrageousness level? Things like this make folks take notice. What's yours?



Chris Visits Czechia

Where in the world was Chris visiting last week? Czechia for the IGCA's annual garden center tour. Where's Czechia and what's the IGCA? Read on for Chris' recap.

Ellen, how can you ask me to sum up five days of foreign travel in a few hundred words? I can't even sum up lunch in a few hundred words—especially if the sandwich was interesting! But I'll give it a go:

Last week, I was in the Czech Republic (aka Czechia) with the International Garden Center Association* to see how the Czechs do garden retailing. There were about 180 of us from 16 countries, including 16 from the U.S. representing six IGCs, so it was a fabulous opportunity to learn while rubbing elbows with some of the best garden center owners from around the world—the name badges were like a who's who of garden center royalty†. Here's a quick summary of

what I learned (for more details, check out my *Acres Online* report, which I submitted live from the event).

1. The Czech Republic is an old country, but at the same time is a very young one. The country of Czechoslovakia was formed in 1918, but after WWII, the country was occupied by the Soviets until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. There was a friendly split of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. Which means it's a young capitalist market, with all the garden centers we visited being less than 30 years old. I was told it's the most stable and prosperous of the former Eastern Bloc countries.

2. Other than some big, stark blocks of Soviet-era apartments (now painted in bright colors), about the only remnant of the communist days is the Czech penchant for growing their own food. When we peeked over walls into gardens, we saw fruit trees, vegetable patches and small greenhouses. Some flowers, yes, notably window boxes spilling forth ivy geraniums, but not extensive displays of color, or even perennials. So it was natural that in the garden centers, seeds, herbs, veggies and fruit bushes and trees are ubiquitous. But we also saw plenty of seasonal annuals and blooming houseplants, so obviously those do get purchased. Fall and Halloween are celebrated with mums and pumpkins.

3. I asked about the foliage and succulents trend. Younger people are interested, but they have not taken off like in the rest of the west. That's in part due to lower incomes and less disposable income. However, the category is growing, and there's plenty available in the garden centers, mostly from Germany and the Netherlands.

4. I mentioned that it's a young industry. Most of the garden centers we visited were started in the mid-'90s or later, even if the original nursery business goes back several generations. Given that, they've come a long way, thanks to driven, enthusiastic owners who've traveled Europe and worked with the best consultants. The result is that Czech garden centers don't necessarily look "Czech" (whatever that might mean). Architecturally, I saw several new greenhouses done in a Dutch or German style, with painted frames, tinted glass at the front, and large, colorful banners depicting seasonal scenes. Inside, display tables were most often modern metal as used throughout Europe. Two things they've added most recently are cafés and gourmet food departments. McDonald's and KFC are also coming fast, so it will be a race to see whether the garden center café can compete against western fast food.

**The IGCA is the association of the world's garden center associations. There are currently 18 members; AmericanHort is the U.S. member. Since 1960, IGCA has held an annual "Congress" somewhere in the world to tour garden centers and share ideas and best practices.*

A Few Ideas from Czechia

Chris continues …

Pallet displays were as common in Czechia as in Cleveland.



Two uses for giant round hay bales.





Social media is as important there as it is here. This “Selfie Spot” is a good way to get free publicity for your business.



Some things are universal.



†Speaking of royalty, the 2019 IGCA Congress will be based in Windsor, England, where a famous royal couple recently got married. The tour will take place September 1-6, and it's guaranteed you'll be blown away by the range of retailers you'll see (not guaranteed you'll see royalty, however). Never been to England and want to see some of the best garden centers and gardens the world has to offer? Well, HERE'S YOUR CHANCE.

About That Spotted Lanternfly

Last week in my "Your Issues" section, I had mentioned that Stephanie Cohen in Pennsylvania expressed her concern about the growing spotted lanternfly population. She wasn't the only one throwing up the alarm! Clemson prof and pest expert J.C. Chong, editor of Ball Publishing's PestTalks *e-newsletter, wrote about the menace just this week. Here's what he had to say:*

This week's "What the … ?" segment is taking a hiatus. Not that I have nothing to share. Oh, I got some "stumpers," y'all. But I'll save them for next week after I can properly identify them.

I'll share something about spotted lanternfly instead. A reader of this newsletter, "SC": just sent me a one-liner last week, "Start talking seriously about spotted lanternfly!"

SC, this is for you. I wrote a short piece in this newsletter earlier this year. But, words often fail to describe the magnitude of the problem. It certainly doesn't convey how freaked out folks in the infested areas are. So, I'll show you a video.

If that many dead lanternflies could be found at one building in Allentown, Pennsylvania, imagine how many more are in the area and the kind of damage they can do to trees and shrubs. I haven't seen a comprehensive assessment of the economic damage of the spotted lanternfly, but it's estimated in the hundreds of millions.

This pest is now found in Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia. It's likely to spread beyond these states, so everyone should keep an eye out for them (if you are outside of the infested areas) and be careful what you ship out of the infested areas.

My thanks to Suzanne "The Buglady" Wainwright-Evans for directing me to the video. Thanks, SC, for reminding me.

Looking for Pots?

Do you know what your mums, heucheras and other fall plants need? Pots that make your customers smile about the season. Same goes for year-end holidays, too. You can find pots that are suitably seasonal for your mums and poinsettias from the folks at daVinci. Here's some visual proof of their festive styles.





And who can resist a Santa-hatted puppy?



No, it's not too late to order. DaVinci's American-made, in-mold-labeled designs are ready to ship. The IML technology means the graphics are superb and UV-resistant dyes mean you'll have a long-lasting product. If they stay on the bench that long. Don't miss a chance to up your game for fall plant sales.

It's Survey Time

It's that time of year again, folks! We have opened up the 10th Annual *Green Profit* Wage & Benefit Survey and the 23rd Annual *GrowerTalks* Wage & Benefit Survey for you to participate in. The surveys have 12-13 quick questions about your operations, staffing, salaries and such. It shouldn't take you more than 10 or 11 minutes, I'd say.

Each year we ask an open-ended question, and this year's revolves around labor. In fact, here's the question in full:

What changes are you making to your business to attract the most qualified workers you can?

Now, if sharing your thoughts on that question is not incentive enough for you to fill out the survey, then maybe winning a brand-new 128GB iPad is, yes? Ah, I thought so! (Bossman Beytes, I'm not eligible for that, huh? Bummer …)

You've got until October 19 to submit your survey. I encourage you to fill it out now, but if you forget, I will certainly remind you over the next few weeks to get on it.

Find the retailer-oriented *Green Profit* survey here.

Find the grower-oriented *GrowerTalks* survey here.

Comments, questions or suggestions? Email me at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



Ellen Wells
Editor-at-Large
Green Profit

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