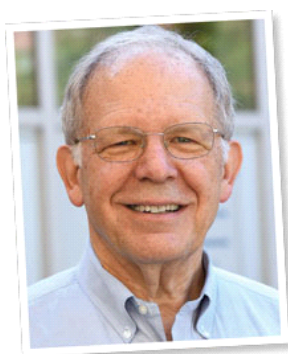


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Yes, There Are New Things!

Bill McCurry



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If you avoid trade shows because you don't think there's anything new, think again.

Under the guidance of Danny Summers of The Garden Center Group, retailers find additional opportunities among new product introductions.



Danny organizes a panel of garden center retailers looking for new things with a potential for creating excitement and sales volume at their respective stores. These retailers then meet after a day of trade show investigation, compare notes and vote overnight on the most impactful new finds. The winning products receive a "Retailers' Choice Award" at Cultivate and Farwest Show. The awards are called

"Cool Products Award" at TPIE (Tropical Plant International Expo), which recognizes the slightly different focus of that show.

When retailers are on the lookout, they not only find new things, but share how their retail customers will respond to these new offerings.

Just a small example of Cultivate's winners include the new Calliope Large Dark Salmon from Syngenta Flowers, which can be popular with homeowners around colleges and alumni celebrating their schools' red colors—like Alabama, The Ohio State University, and other large and small schools. Or Suntory Flowers' Sun Parasol FiredUp Orange Dipladenia hybrid. And the new Angelonia AngelFlare Black from Ball FloraPlant provoked discussion about expanding plant offerings for fall celebrations like Halloween and other activities.

The Garden Center Group membership isn't necessary to participate. Any garden center retailer can be on the new product evaluation panel. Vendors and non-retailers though are not eligible. These are exclusively retailer perspectives. At the end of day one, the judges gather and explain their picks to each other. The retailers' value to this process is that they've heard the perceptions of dozens of other retailers who've looked at the same or new products on the show floor. It's common to have multiple retailers discover different things within the same booth. It's also common for retailers to see things that have been on the market a while, but slipped their notice. The reporting session provides a unique evaluation from a variety of perspectives—something retailers can't get alone.

Once the voting is finalized from dozens of nominations, usually 15 awards are given out. On the second show day, judges receive the entire list of nominations they can see. The entire list is private and advantageous for panel members to revisit. Danny Summers does a live presentation on the second day of the convention. He introduces the 15 winners, with the products on display and discusses the attributes of the new items with the vendor. This

session is worth sitting in on because it becomes a report from dozens of garden centers on what they found of value. These trade shows are normally so large that one person can't see everything in each booth. Having dozens of other eyes looking out for new products makes efficient use of your time. At the review session, Danny provides the booth numbers of the winners so you can beeline straight to the booths that interest you.

The majority of the new products are plants that fill niches retailers feel can be exploited by their garden center with proper marketing. Some years, store fixtures, equipment or carts might be a new product. Other times the products could be garden tools or hardware. There are no exclusions. Anything that would help the retailer or the retail customer is included.

Any garden center can sign up for The Garden Center Group Newsletter "GROUPTalk," which includes sign-up links for upcoming Retailers' Choice Awards or Cool Product Awards Searches. To get GROUPTalk, register at thegardencentergroup.com/contact-us.

Watch for sign-up information at future events. Plan to participate fully and listen to the ideas and rationale from other garden centers. Likely it will be the most productive time you've ever spent at a horticultural trade show. It'll also lead to making new contacts with other garden centers, broadening your information and networking system.

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Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 731-8389.