

Our visit to Michael's Nursery, plus living walls



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TROPICAL TOPICS

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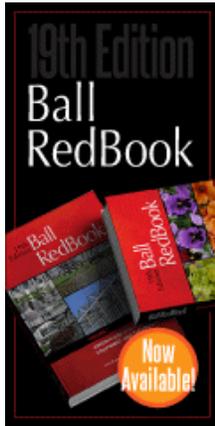
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Michael's Nursery

Our third and final pre-TPIE grower visit took us to Michael's Nursery in Boynton Beach, Florida. It should more accurately be called Jim's Nursery, as in Jim Leider, the operation's owner. "Who is this Michael?" the ever-curious Chris Beytes asked him. The guy he bought the business from several decades ago, Jim told us. It was even in a different location back then.

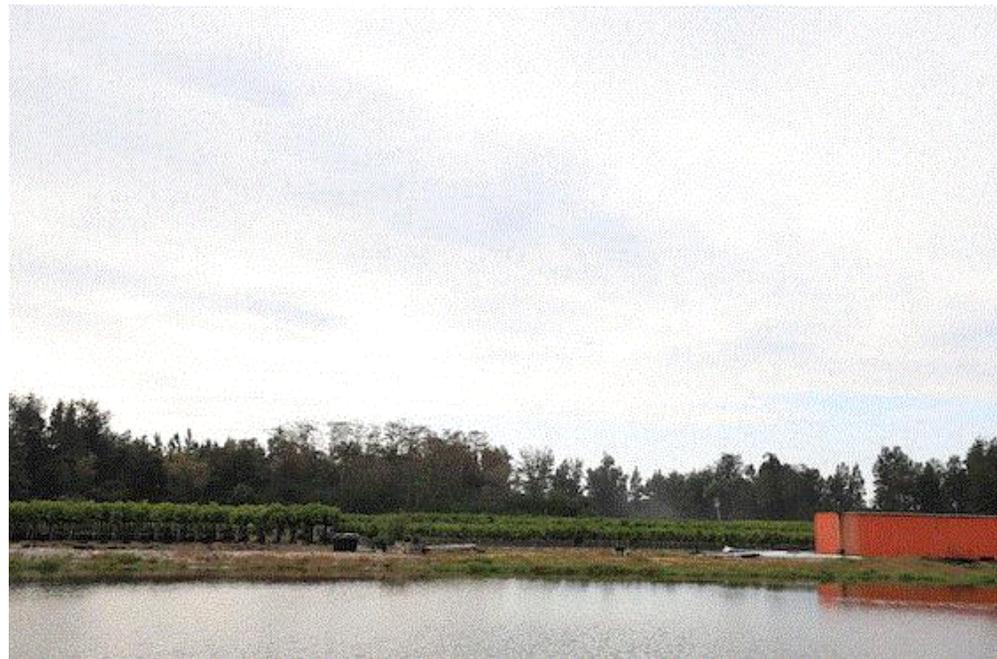
But back to the present day and our tour of the 35-acre facility with Jim and colleague Mark Battaglini. Unlike our previous two stops, Garden Industries and Excelsa Gardens in Loxahatchee—both of which could be categorized as specialty tropical nurseries—Michael's is more large-scale bench production of more mainstream products, including some annuals. For instance, they keep hundreds of stock plants of several ipomoea varieties and produce cuttings galore.





Jim Leider, right, with Mark Battaglini, in front of the ipomoea stock plants.

As for tropicals, they are bursting at the seams with the popular stuff—croton, phormium, Boston fern, philodendrons of various varieties and sizes, and a bunch of other stuff. Need some *Ficus lyrata* in tree form? They've got a few—about 30,000—at least, they did back in January.



Above, a few thousand or so *Ficus lyratas* in tree form out in the field.



Since Jim was in the business back when the first houseplant frenzy occurred in the 1970s, Chris asked him how today's craze compares. While houseplants are certainly hot now, he doesn't see the demand and desire as intense as it was back in the day. Jim says it's the fashion magazines (and digital equivalents) that are driving the trend. As for the other big buyer of tropicals—the interiorscape segment of the industry—Jim says those sales seem to be flat or down. What he does see, however, is a growing demand for more height in a smaller pot size. For instance, interiorscapers are trending toward 14-in. plants in 10-in. pots, which didn't use to be the case.

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What Initiated the Visit

The visit with Jim and Mark at Michael's really was a bonus, the cherry on top of our day. I had initially contacted Jim to ask for a few details on the living wall that GSKy Plant Systems—a company in which he is a partner—had installed in nearby Delray Beach. And gosh, am I glad we visited, because that gave us a “behind the plants” look at how living walls are produced.

At its most basic level, a finished wall is the arrangement of these tiles, the “container” that living wall plants are planted and grown in.



Each tile is created out of steel and contains a manufactured growing medium within which a pattern of holes has been created. There are hooks on the back of each that help attach the tile to the underlying frame.

These tiles are planted with the varieties as laid out in the designer's diagram. Notice how these sketches have squares with circles inside—indicating planting holes—with colors representing the varieties. Each bench is planted with a portion of the overall wall.



These planted tiles eventually ended up attached to the side of a new building that houses an iPic theater, parking garage and miscellaneous retail.



Extraordinary, don't you think? This photo was taken over a month ago, and it's likely grown in a bit since then, with possibly a few cells replaced here and there.

GSky has nearly 700 installations—both indoor and outdoor—located in 16 countries. Having just celebrated their 15th anniversary, you can imagine the technology has advanced greatly since the company first got off the ground—literally. To celebrate, they've put together a video showing just a few of their walls. Click on the photo below to watch it. Impressive stuff!



Speaking of Living Walls

Gsky's work is pretty phenomenal, but sometimes you just want a simple living wall that could be flexible and temporary. Both Chris and I have spotted a few of those over the last month.





These three were at Floral Emporium, a high-end florist/garden center in West Palm Beach, Florida. The orchid wall was quite nice and looked a little more substantial than the other two, which are simply suspended air plants hanging to create a wall. But creative nonetheless.





The “walls” in the Costa Farms booth at TPIE were created using super-simple props that you could buy at a home store—a curtain and hanging shoe storage thingsies.



Chris spotted this wall at IPM in the floristry demo area. It’s a green wall made of beverage bottle crates interspersed with water glasses, filled with random tropical leaves. I quite like it!



About That Tupidanthus

In the last *Tropical Topics*, I included a photo of *Tupidanthus calyptratus* taken at Excelsa Gardens. According to my tropical plant expert friend Richard Criley, this plant has recently been reclassified by taxonomists into the Schefflera genus and is now known as *Schefflera pueckleri*. Richard said it was marketed as a large houseplant in the 1970s and isn't sure why it fell out of favor. I mean, look at it! It's a gorgeous specimen. This variegated form will check all the right "hot plant" boxes when Excelsa starts offering it soon.



As for reclassifying, Wikipedia does automatically redirect to its Schefflera page when you search for Tupidanthus. It explains that the Schefflera genus "has had a turbulent taxonomic history," and then lists 20 synonyms. I'd definitely say that's turbulent!

Final Chance

Just a reminder that the deadline for nominating a 35-and-under grower or retailer for the *GrowerTalks/Nexus* Young Grower Award and the *Green Profit/RBI* Young Retailer Award is March 1. We know you're busy, so we've created quick-and-easy nomination forms. You can find

them [HERE](#) for the Young Grower and [HERE](#) for the Young Retailer. Best of luck to your nominees.

Comments, questions or news to share? Just drop me a line at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



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