

Features

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The Chosen Ones

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I think several of this year's Retailers' Choice Award winners adhere to the idea of making things easy on customers, in the vein of, "Don't make me think," and solve consumer problems without them having to put too much effort into it.

For instance, Botanical Interests' EcoEase Seed Shaker Lawn Alternatives. The three different seed options—Microclover and Fescue Lawn Mix, White Clover Lawn, and Flowering Mix—are all low-maintenance lawn alternatives that create a dense, foot traffic-tolerant groundcover that requires little to no mowing. And they thrive in poor soils, partial shade, and use less water and no fertilizers and herbicides. It's as if someone saw my horrible lawn and created something just for me.

As The Garden Center Group's Danny Summers likes to remind us, these are just 15 of the dozens of gems the retailer judges found on the trade show floor. Everything out there is precious—if you know how to sell it!

Concept Plants' new Sofia Cherry Laurel is compact and looks more like a holly or boxwood. It makes a nice item for a low-growing hedge or for containers, or form it into a topiary. Tolerance of both extreme cold (down to -25C) and heat, it's a low-maintenance plant that has good disease resistance and requires minimal pruning.

Dümmen Orange's Petunia Sweetunia Violet Vortex. The retailer judges loved this one for its unique swirls of violet, soft cream and even pistachio under the right conditions. With a medium habit and vigor, it's ideal as a filler in combos.



Oberland AgriScience's 2nd Nature Organic Plant Food is a product we've mentioned before. It's made from the frass of the black soldier fly larvae (BSFL) and it's a good source of chitin, what with it being a byproduct of insects. It also provides organic matter and beneficial nutrients.

Next is Carnivorous Butterwort in Little Prince of Oregon's Lords of the Fly Collection. The retailer judges loved the name of the collection and the look of this lime green *Pinguicula Guatemala*, in particular. Retailers: Use the tags and highlight the series name to take full advantage of the retail magic.

Monrovia took home two RCAs this year. The first is for their Pot Belly *Pittosporum*, hardy in Zones 8 to 11. It's a tidy ball-shaped shrub—smaller than others available—with shiny green leaves and small, dark red and fragrant flowers that emerge in spring to early summer.

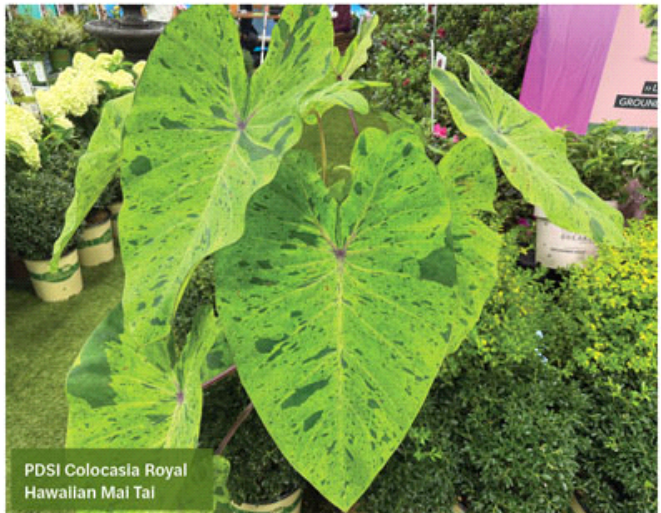


Monrovia's second RCA is for a superb scabiosa called Skyrocket. Just look at the size of those bicolored double blooms! They turn from a violet and cream flower to eventually all blue. I just love how they dance above a tidy package of green leaves. And because they have sturdy stems, they can

PanAmerican Seed's Lanna Lace African Marigold features creamy white double flowers that really do shake off weather and water well. These are ideal for both beds and mixed containers. African marigolds are making a comeback!

Plant Development Services, Inc. (PDSI) also brought home two RCAs this year. The first goes to Colocasia Royal Hawaiian Mai Tai, which I mentioned in Tropical Topics as a Bobbleheads find at this year's CAST. As a refresher, Mai Tai is a medium clump-forming colocasia with camo-like zesty lemon-and-green foliage on stems that have a unique white and black striping. It's excellent for premium containers, borders and mass plantings in full sun to part shade.

Next up from PDSI is Carex Lunar Falls. Look at that variegated mop! This is a fast-growing cool-season sedge with arching, nearly white leaves with just a narrow green strip. Love the way it spills, which would look great in anything from containers to walls and walkway edges.



Proven Winners Sweet Caroline Bewitched After Midnight II—the "II" indicating this is an improvement. Now, the

photos of black-leaved plants never do them justice, but this black is black. The improvement is that the foliage is much darker and thicker than the previous version and it doesn't fade in the sun and heat—even in the South. If you're looking for items for "goth gardening," this one fits the bill.



I've mentioned Suntory Flowers' Sun Parasol Giant Powder Pink Mandevilla in my newsletter, Tropical Topics, too. This one is a biggie, with flowers up to 5 in. in diameter. These are natural climbers, so use a trellis. The Giants are the most heat tolerant of the Sun Parasols and are also highly disease resistant. And that color—oh, my!

Syngenta Flowers' Coffee Shop Lavender Latte Dahlia features dark foliage and fully double blooms that hold their shape throughout the season. With excellent powdery mildew resistance, the Coffee Shop Dahlias are just the right size for patio pots, cutting gardens and landscape beds.

The most interesting flowers I saw had to be these Elegance pansies in the Antoinette & Twilight Collections out of Tagawa Greenhouse. Bred by Isao Sato, these pansies feature ruffled blooms in so many colors! From soft whites and pastels in the Antoinette Collection to the dark cherries and purples of the Twilight Collection, pansies are no longer two dimensional!

Last and certainly not least—in fact, it may have been the talk of the show—are the new Fyre Wing Heucheras from Terra Nova Nurseries. When I had Chuck Pavlich on my "I Dig Your Story" podcast a few months ago, he'd hinted that he'd been working on something completely new, something that would be the culmination of his life's work. And, gosh, isn't it! It's a series of seven doubly serrated, lacy foliage varieties in some gorgeous colors, with each variety having a completely different lacy leaf shape. If that isn't fun enough, each variety is named after a semi-precious stone and associated with a different dragon character with its own backstory (I'm guessing someone in marketing is into D&D or Tolkien). They'll be great in the landscape, for sure, but just think of all the dimensions they'll bring to a premium container combo! **GP**



Suntory Flowers' Sun
Parasol Giant Powder
Pink Mandevilla



Syngenta Flowers'
Coffee Shop Lavender
Latte Dahlia



Antoinette & Twilight
Collections out of
Tagawa Greenhouse



Fyre Wing Heucheras
from Terra Nova
Nurseries