

Cool plants, cool kids and a colorful triangular ficus



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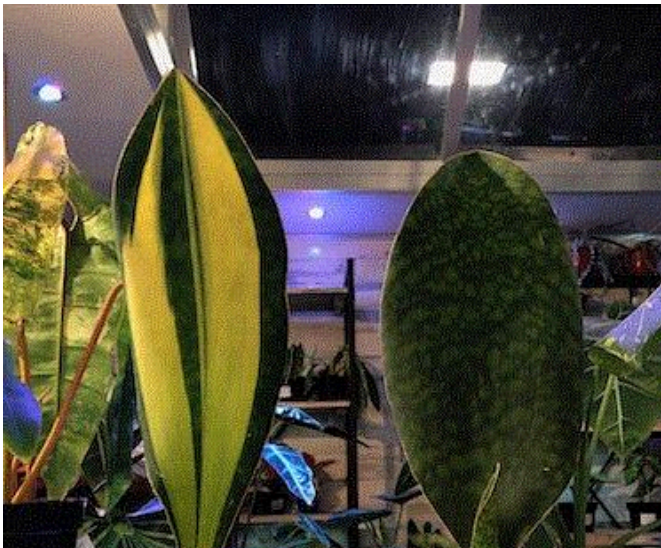
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Fulfilling My Promise

In the last *Tropical Topics*, I promised to cover the plants that were chosen as the Cool New Products during last month's Tropical Plant International Expo (TPIE). I see about nine of them, and I'll cover six of them this week. Deal?

Remember the folks from Aroid Greenhouses, the family who had that really cool plant truck they'd drive around to farm markets? The retailers choosing this year's Cool New Products found two—no, three!—items at their booth that they picked as items they thought hit the mark with consumers. The first is this sansevieria called Whale Fin. Flat, fin-shaped snake plants are not that new, but Aroid had two different versions—one with a mottled light and dark green "fin" and the other with a prominent strip of light yellow-green variegation.





The third from Aroid Greenhouses is a variegated ZZ plant. The judges said this version of the ZZ plant had the largest amount of variegation they had ever seen.



Remember, folks—variegation in houseplants is hot hot hot! If you have variegation popping up on some sports, I'd see if you could run with it.

Here's a plant that doesn't have variegation, per se, but ... well, you be the judge.



This is a dracaena called Harvest Moon from Capri Farms. The patented variety has what the judges called a “very dramatic” color effect with bright yellow foliage with thin green longitudinal bands. And for a dracaena it has a wide range of light tolerance. Retailers, it’ll likely be available for spring 2021.



The Next Three

Costa Farms, I know, has a warehouse full of aglaonema in development and they release new varieties of them each and every year. One of this year’s introductions garnered a Cool New Product Award. It’s called SRA—at least for the moment, as I believe they are coming up with a new name for when it’s available in 2021.



The judges commented that it almost seems like it's on fire, it's so red. And the green in the leaves really makes that red pop. Thick, well-branched growth makes it a sturdy product, too.

Another ZZ plant makes the Cool New Product list. This one is from Deroose Plants and is called Nova Star. Its leaves are dark, dark green to the point of being nearly black. Looks like a sturdy plant, too.



The last Cool New Product plant for today is from Excelsa Gardens. *Alocasia odorata* Variegata is one of those plants with some extreme variegation, meaning the green is quite green and the variegation is very creamy yellow, with the patterning being absolutely no pattern at all. It's a showstopper, for sure.



Next time around I'll have the last three Cool New Product plants as well as a few items that caught my eye. Maybe *you* spotted something completely different and want to share? If so, drop me a note about it at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



About That Ficus

In my last *Tropical Topics*, I had written that Realtor.com had produced a list of which houseplants were deemed “out” and which were suddenly on the “it” list. You will recall that the author kicked the fiddle-leaf fig to the curb and instead had favored *Ficus triangularis*. They described it as “... incredibly hardy, rather quick-growing, easy to care for and very playful-looking.”

Richard Criley, my “man in the field” in Hawaii, wrote in with commentary of his own. “The triangle-leafed ficus tends to be a bit floppy as a young plant, but it is well-branched and can look full,” Richard said. And he adds, “I wouldn't discount the large-leaved ficus for interior plants as there are lots of other ones besides the fiddle-leaf fig and Indian rubber tree. You just have to find the ones that will do well in an interior setting.”



Nice leaves, for sure! And it's variegated, which is very "in" right now, too. Who has any in production? And who wants it? Let me connect you. Drop me a line about it [HERE](#).



Capturing the Kids

How do we keep the houseplant trend going? Let's get the school kids interested so we are assured of customers a decade down the road.

I can see where getting kids interested in tropicals could be a bit of a slow process, and hence would be a hard thing to catch their attention. I mean it's not as easy as planting a kidney bean in a cut-off milk carton and watching it sprout in a day or two. A recent KidsGardening.org e-newsletter included some tips in the form of a school lesson plan all about tropicals.

Grab their attention by focusing on what interests these kids—and this generation is super-interested in the environment. This lesson plan concentrates on explaining how tropical rainforest plants have adapted to their environment and has them study how the health of the rainforest is tied to the health of our planet.

The lesson plan, adapted from "GrowLab: Classroom Activities for Indoor Gardens and Grow Lights" by Eve Pranis and Joy Cohen, takes kids through the various levels of a rainforest and explains how the whole rainforest ecosystem works—from the roots to the canopy. Included in the plan is a period for the kids to observe a range of houseplants—from crotons to orchids—and asks them to assess how their forms would be beneficial to living in a tropical rainforest environment. Take a look at the [LESSON PLAN OVERVIEW](#). How can you use this? What can

you glean from this to use in your own business?

When you think of how important rainforests are to the health of the world, it makes you feel good about growing tropicals, doesn't it?

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



Ellen Wells
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