

GCA tours Boston, plus more tropicals, markets and two questions



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:
GCA Heads to BOS
And Here's the Rest
Virgil's Plant Shop
You Haven't Missed the Market!
Speaking of March ...
Galentine's Day
What Market Trends Will
Impact You?
Who Wants to Talk?

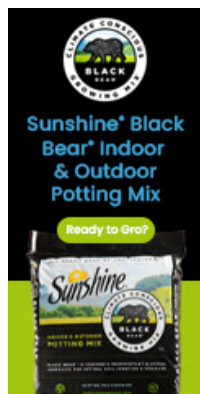


GCA Heads to BOS

Garden Centers of America will be heading to my hometown—Boston, Massachusetts—for its annual GCA Summer Tour. The tour dates—June 22-25—are a good time to visit our fair city as the students are gone, the traffic is less congested and the weather is typically superb. I can't promise crazy drivers won't be on the roads or that the T will be working properly—those things never change.

So, where will we be visiting?

- Briggs Garden & Home, North Attleborough
- Cataldo's Gift & Garden, Littleton
- Kane's Flower World, Danvers
- Mahoney's Garden Center, Winchester, Brighton and Concord
- McCue Garden Center, Woburn
- Nunan Florist & Greenhouses, Georgetown



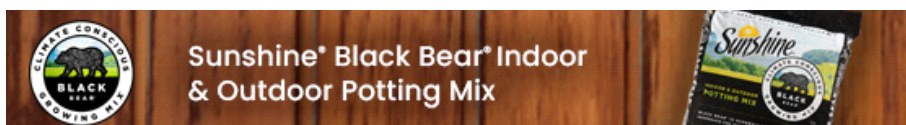
- Russell's Garden Center, Wayland
- Weston Nurseries, Hopkinton
- Wolf Hill Garden Center, Ipswich

Some non-IGC stops are on the tour, too, including the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University in Jamaica Plain and Faneuil Hall Marketplace in Boston. And if you're stopping at Faneuil Hall, the last stop on Wednesday, the Boston Public Market and the nearby revitalized Seaport District are a must for their retail models. I'll drop a bit more info about those places in the coming weeks.

The host hotel for the GCA Summer Tour of the greater Boston area is Embassy Suites by Hilton in nearby Waltham. Book your rooms early! Boston fills up with summer visitors pretty quickly. Register ASAP and even get some early-bird savings at www.GardenCentersofAmerica.com.

Oh, by the way, the GCA tours usually run Sunday-Wednesday, but this event is lined up for Monday-Thursday. So I checked with Jeff Morey at GCA to see if he'd gotten a bargain calendar that had included a February 30th on it. No, that's not the case. He said this year's Sunday of the tour corresponds with Father's Day, and in the past he had requests for the tour to start a day later when that happens.

If Father's Day doesn't matter to you, maybe you extend your stay on the front end. Museums are everywhere, the food is terrific and the people watching—you gotta come just to listen to the variety of New England accents. Or book the weekend in Providence, Rhode Island, and tour some IGCs from Newport eastward. If you want to extend your stay and need some suggestions for what to do, I'm happy to help. Drop me a line at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



And Here's the Rest

You may (or may not) have caught six of the nine plant-focused Cool New Products from the Tropical Plant International Expo in *Tropical Topics* earlier this week. If not, you can read all about them [HERE](#). (See how I'm encouraging cross-readership?)

Lucky for you, in this edition of *Buzz* I will include the remaining three planty Cool New Products as chosen by The Garden Center Group-led band of retailers walking the TPIE show floor.

Those last three are:



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Selaginella uncinata Rainbow Peacock Fern from Morning Dew Tropical Plants. They had it in a hanging basket and so it was a huge hit with both the judges and just regular ol' attendees. The "peacock" reference comes from its blueish sheen when the light hits it just right. Some say it's hardy to Zone 6. Is it? I say give it a try.



Selaginella uncinata Rainbow Peacock Fern

Fiddle-leaf figs are nothing new, but the specimen that was in the booth of Railroad Nursery was outstanding—or should I say "up"standing? According to the judges it had one of the most upright habits of any *Ficus lyrata* they've seen. And according to the Railroad Nursery folks, the leaves point up and remain up.



Ficus lyrata from Railroad Nursery

Lastly, the judges chose the kokedamas from [Kazumi Garden](#). This item and this company have an interesting story, which you'll read more about in the March issue of *Green Profit*. But long story short: company founder Mercedes Manosalva Gereda discovered the art of kokedama while visiting her daughter in Japan. With the encouragement of her son, she started a backyard business, Kazumi Garden, when she returned to Florida.



Kokedamas from Kazumi Garden.

Quite honestly, these are some of the highest-quality kokedamas I've seen. TPIE was their first industry trade show and they were a hit!

If you're annoyed with my jumping around from newsletter to newsletter including this and that Cool New Product award, you can see them all in one place thanks to this [VIDEO](#) created by the husband and wife team of Chris and Laurie Beytes. It's a good one!



Virgil's Plant Shop

I have that information I promised you about the woman who converted a small school bus into a mobile plant store and is bopping around Kansas City selling plants. Her name is Rebecca Hamilton and she admits she's no horticulturist, just a self-described lover of plants. That love compelled her to open some sort of plant business and, having had no experience operating a business, she thought a mobile shop would be a cheaper way to get up and going. Plus there's all that free advertising with a decorated vehicle.

Her first thought was a box truck, but a small bus has windows for sunlight and air movement. She bought a bus for about \$7,000 from a bus dealership (used ones online were too iffy). A friend helped her convert the bus by removing seats, replacing the floors, installing shelves and sanding and painting the bus exterior themselves. Obtaining the agricultural licensing was a bit tricky due to the mobile business being in two different states.



Before ...

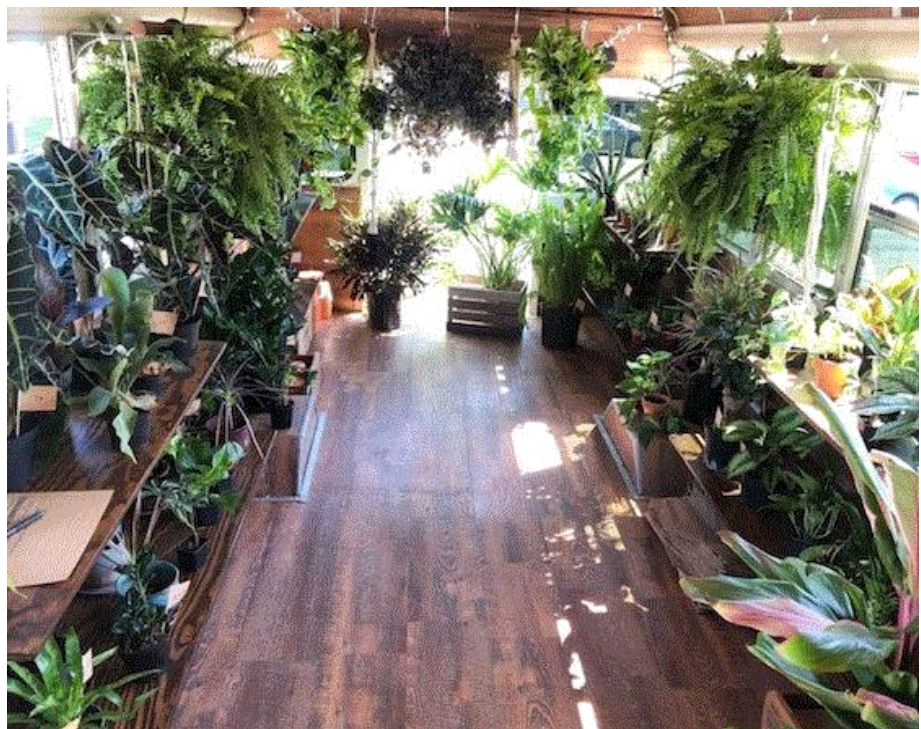


... and after!

After getting the bus ready to roll in about two weeks, she connected to a wholesale grower from whom she obtains enough plants to do two to five pop-up locations each week. Her grand-opening pop-up sounded like a lot of fun—she set up outside of a coffee shop and she basically had a potting party going on while she projected the movie "Little Shop of Horrors" onto the bus's exterior after dusk. Hundreds of people came.

Her basic method for popping up places is contacting local businesses outside of which her bus will fit, parking there for the afternoon and opening up shop. She tries to be at the same location with the same hours at least once a week ("I felt it was important to at least have one regular spot people didn't need to chase me down on my socials."). Her e-newsletter and socials included a section where fans could request the bus at functions—and that has been a successful strategy of opening up new markets and furthering her exposure.

During the summer, she kept the plants on the bus. As the weather cooled, she moved them into her heated garage and then into a short-term and small-space storefront (just 150 sq. ft.)!



"This has been fun and rewarding, meeting other artists to carry their plant-related items, and generally getting to know the community," Rebecca wrote in an email. "It's not easy, but the hustle is worth the work and this has given me the skills to take these smaller steps to expand to a larger brick and mortar."

I like her hustle! Rebecca certainly has some staying power, considering so many things could have knocked a lesser-determined person out of the race. Remember when your grandfather set up a fruit stand on the corner lot? And now you're a thriving multi-generational business. Same difference, except Grandpa's business required customers to come to him.



We'll check back in with Rebecca when she's back on the road this spring. Check her out online at <http://virgilsplantshop.com/>.

Rudbeckia 'Treasure Trove'
New to Proven Winners
Perennials for 2025-2026!



You Haven't Missed the Market!

Did you not make it to AmericasMart in Atlanta last month? If so, you still have a chance to grab some products for your gift and home décor departments. AmericasMart's spring buying event is being refreshed and revitalized into what they are calling the Spring Mini Market and will be happening March 4-6.

You'll get a chance to peruse more than 1,000 (!) showrooms and the specially curated collection of more than 50 temporaries. "The update of the March market in Atlanta better reflects its unique identity in the IMC tradeshow calendar," said Bob Maricich, International Market Centers' CEO. "New tours and a new programming format make the market accessible and actionable for both new and loyal buyers. The new name differentiates it from our major Winter and Summer markets and better reflects its positioning as a more intimate buying event with access to trend-driven product and business-building education and events." The new name and the facelift replaces the Atlanta Spring Gift, Home Furnishings & Holiday Market.



Someone find me that Dolly notebook, STAT!

More than 75 of the showrooms that will be open are ones that were either new, expanded or had relocated for the Winter market. There will also be a bunch of seasonal/gift and outdoor living brands, many of which will be for immediate receiving.

Preregister now for Spring Mini Market at Registration.AmericasMart.com. By preregistering, buyers can obtain FastBadges to expedite the on-campus arrival process. What a great way to start your March.



Speaking of March ...

March is when we northerners plant our spring peas. And thanks to All-America Selections, we have a new, AAS award-winning pea variety to plant—as well as a new award-winning delphinium and zinnia. These three varieties join 14 other previously announced 2020 winners. Let's introduce you to these latest:

About that pea ... it's called Snak Hero and it's a National winner, so it does well throughout the country. It produces slender, 4-in. long pods that look kinda/sorta like green beans, but have the taste and texture of a snap pea. Super-sweet and delicious, these stringless peas are great for fresh snacking, stir frying or freezing. These can be grown with or without supports in the garden, and why not put them in a hanging basket? Bred by Syngenta Seeds.



Next up is Delphinium Dewy Blue and it's an annual type of delphinium. It has a compact habit of about 12 inches tall and wide and produces gorgeous blue flowers with an earlier bloom time and extended bloom period into early summer. This seed-propagated variety is vigorous, has excellent germination and is easy to grow. Bred by Miyoshi & Co., Dewy Blue is a winner in the Northeast and West/Northwest regions.



And last but not least, Zinnia Holi Pink is a regional winner in the Southeast region because it withstands the heat, humidity and bleaching sun conditions to remain fresh-looking all season long. The judges claim it has superior disease resistance and produces a large number of sizable blooms with only minimal deadheading required. Bred by Ameriseed.



As always, these three AAS winners are available as they become available in the distribution chain. Do yourself a favor and take advantage of the bench cards and other promo materials from AAS, which you can search for [HERE](#).



Galentine's Day

Not everyone has a romantic partner to honor with hearts and flowers on Valentine's Day. Some retailers are considering that when coming up with events to celebrate the February holiday. Such as? Well, such as the Ohio-based plant store and design company Planthropy. They hosted a "Galentine's Day" experience as part of their [special workshop](#) series and it promises to be a "fun, hands-on way to learn about succulents while creating your own arrangement."

They didn't actually host the event, but rather worked with the folks at Via Vecchia Winery in Columbus. Sipping wine, creating a succulent arrangement and learning how to not kill it—sounds like a perfect evening out with your "bff, your tribe, your favorite gal (or guy) pal," as they stated in their email about the event. What I liked best about their email is that they included "a fabulous night out" as one of the materials included in the workshop. A promise fulfilled, I bet.

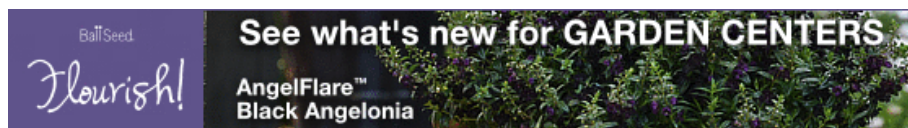
As the younger Millennial and Gen Z generations find partners later in life, events that focus on friends and "the tribe" are becoming more sought after. Planting parties? Perfect. What kind of plant-focused buddy workshops can you put on your store's calendar?



What Market Trends Will Impact You?

As we head into spring, it would be good to know what big market trends will be impacting small businesses—including your own small business. I found an article from [Forbes.com](#) about just such a thing. They list seven trends that independent businesses such as yourselves should pay attention to. They are:

1. Main Street will have a renaissance. It even lists plants as one of Main Street's benefits! "There's no model or algorithm that can replace your pipes, cut your hair, or guarantee tulips for your daughter's winter wedding."
2. Less reliance on the large tech players for growth. Uh? "Increased government regulation of tech giants like Amazon and Google will facilitate this return to more independent distribution among smaller e-commerce players looking to gain competitive advantage."
3. Marketers will rely less on data and more on great storytelling. Data and targeting can only get a company so far. Creating stories that resonate with an audience can be a way to self-select people who will respond to them.
4. Side hustles will become real businesses. I think we've seen this a bunch with plant fanatics who love it so much they open a plant store. Technology is "drastically reducing the friction to start and build a business."
5. Increased value placed on sustainability vs. pure growth. The article says it best: "... startups will shift to valuing profitability and sustainability over pure growth acquisition ... This will be in part because of increased government scrutiny of these 'unicorns,' and these companies themselves value correcting and breaking apart. The result will be an increase in entrepreneurship and power going back into the hands of the small business owner."
6. AI will automate mundane tasks, paving the way for more innovation. AI will take over the role of the small routine tasks of business, such as taking notes, scheduling and such, taking these off the plates of the business owner so they can focus on moving the business forward.
7. Small businesses will go cashless, relying on digital payment methods. "Even those with a physical storefront are finding that digital payment methods are commonplace, so they will possibly go cashless, no longer needing to maintain cash on-hand and deal with the day-in and day-out burden of managing physical currency." However, there have been a rash of community regulations that are banning cashless physical stores as they implicitly discriminate against those who may not have credit and/or bank accounts. I'll be interested in how this plays out in the coming couple of years.



Who Wants to Talk?

Because we at Ball Publishing definitely want to listen. Specifically to the answers to these following questions:

- Have you found any good strategies to tackle the age-old question of how to convince customers to grab fertilizer when they buy plants?
- And, have you found the perfect formula for up- and down-sizing your houseplant department depending on season? And—this is a good one—have you found the ideal location for it within the layout of your store?

As you've likely guessed, these are the topics of a couple of upcoming *Green Profit* articles, and we'd love your input. So, if you have a good fertilizer add-on strategy, drop an email to [BILL CALKINS](#) about it. Or if your houseplant department is rockin' the register due to well-aligned placement and sizing, please do drop [ME](#) a line about it. Let's talk.



Comments, questions, suggestions? Send 'em to ewells@ballpublishing.com.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ellen'.

Ellen Wells
Editor-at-Large
Green Profit

This week's BuZZ! was sent to 19,772 loyal readers!

If you're interested in advertising on BuZZ! contact [Kim Brown](#) ASAP!

A black rectangular banner with white and gold text. The top line reads 'The Only Magazine' in a gold cursive font. Below it, in a large, bold, white sans-serif font, is the phrase 'GROWERS AND RETAILERS FLIP OVER.'