Marching toward spring, losing heart, finding privacy and what comes after Z?



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Green Profit's buZZ

Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

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Action Alert!

The H-2B visa issue is still undecided but reports indicate that the Department of Homeland Security is expected to announce a final decision regarding supplemental visas soon. As we've reported before, we have a demand for seasonal employment that is three times the number of visas currently available. No additional visas, it'll be difficult to find the labor this and other industries need.

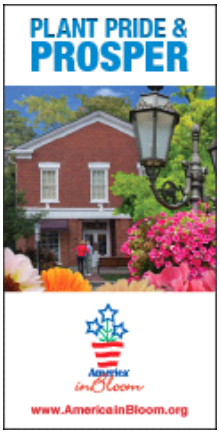
Tristan Daedalus, Director, Advocacy & Policy Communications for AmericanHort, just sent out a message saying that the *Wall Street Journal* reported on February 20 that DHS is considering adding 45,000 supplemental H-2B visas for FY2020. The article also indicated these additional visas could be released in two batches—20,000 for April 1 job start dates and the remainder for jobs starting June 1 or later.

AmericanHort is making it easy for you to contact your Senators and Representatives to let them know you support releasing the maximum number of visas allowed (or at least 45,000) and that the majority of visas must be released immediately. You simply CLICK HERE to access a form that takes your message directly to your representatives' office.



The March Toward Spring





March is a hard month. It's still winter, mostly. It's still some sort of blending of brown and gray. And while the big boxes may have geranium baskets available, it's still barely in the 30s and 40s for much of the country. But customers have cabin fever and they want to do something, even if it's just rake the lawn and see if any tulips are emerging.

What can a garden center do when the gardening itch can't sufficiently be scratched? How about help satisfy the gardening craving just a bit with a flower and garden show?

Hicks Nurseries on Long Island, New York, has been doing that for decades now. They'll be hosting their 30th annual Flower & Garden Show March 12-29 with the theme "Celebration Around the World." And unlike some of the larger professional flower shows like Philly and Boston, this one is free. Maybe that's why it draws tens of thousands to the nursery each year. Or maybe it's all the flowers and inspiration people can see, such as 16,000 sq.ft. of gardens in full bloom. And with keeping with this year's theme, the garden designs will represent Holland's tulips, India's Holi Festival, Brazil's Mardi Gras Carnival, the Chinese New Year, Hawaii's luau, Mexico's Día de los Muertos and a good-ol' All-American tribute.

HAWAIIAN LUAU

The Hawaiian Luau welcomes us to paradise with warm genuine greetings that are a hallmark of Hawaiian hospitality. This garden is a feast for the eyes featuring a plethora of lush tropical flowers amid a sheer waterfall. Mahalo!







Hicks' also has a full line-up of free seminars. From small space gardening and veggies to natives and lawn care, the topics are ones that, once learned, can get gardeners gardening as soon as the weather allows. And with seminars about houseplants and gardening with kids, folks can actually get gardening before Mother Nature says go. To learn more about Hicks' Flower Show, click HERE.

Does your garden center hold a flower show to get customers excited about the coming year? How might a show be done on a smaller scale? Drop your ideas HERE.



Competing for a Limited Pool

Doing what Hicks does is one way a small company can compete with big companies for customers, ones even in different product categories. Competing for employees? That might be a little more of a problem.

But it's doable. A recent Forbes.com article provided nine ways small businesses could compete when trying to hire new employees. I mean, what, only a plant-loving, outdoorsy hort geek would prefer want to work at a garden center as opposed to the air-conditioned Best Buy at the local mega shopping complex, right?

The nine suggestions include perks that larger companies are less likely to offer, such as:

1. Offer flexible scheduling. Allow your employees to create work schedules that best fit their lives.

2. Explore remote-work opportunities. If the position allows, offer remote-work opportunities if child or elder care or some other reason might impact the employee, or offer "work from home day" every month.

3. Establish a casual dress code. I think garden centers actually do fairly well with this item. Check that box!

4. Provide free food. Aside from coffee and office snacks, sometimes businesses benefit from a shared lunch, allowing staff to chill and talk casually. Bonding!

5. Offer more frequent bonuses. The author's reasoning for giving bonuses rather than raises is this: "The practice of offering bonuses tied to company performance is a safer bet and can motivate employees to watch expenses and meet goals. When the company is doing well, everyone benefits by receiving bonuses based on a percentage of net profits. During tougher times, bonuses can be scaled back or put on hold to make your business more sustainable."

6. PTO instead of separate vacation and sick time. This ties back to the employees having more flexibility and control when they need or want to take time off from work.

7. Emphasize job stability. While some folks believe small businesses have a higher risk of laying off employees than a big company, emphasize your company's stability—and have your grandpa (who may have established your business) come in as proof!

8. Provide offices instead of cubicles. Not sure how applicable this is to garden retail, but it's a thought for those positions that might benefit.

9. Allow flexible vacation time. Larger companies often have folks pick vacation times based on seniority. How might you be able to make adjustments to that scenario?



What Comes After Z?

If you're talking about generational demographics, then the answer would be Alpha. I first heard the term Generation Alpha floated around by Garden Media Group's Katie Dubow, who has two Gen Alpha children herself. We've finished with the Romans and are moving on to the Greeks, apparently.

I'd read plenty of articles about how the generation after Gen Z wouldn't have a label at all because the generational differences were becoming less and less distinguishable. Just as Max Luthy described "post-demographic consumerism" in the age of "tribes," or people grouped by interest, not by age (read Chris Beytes' summary about this part of Max Luthy's 2018 TPIE keynote HERE). Now, while actual professional demographers may feel the differences between generations are miniscule to non-existent, product marketers have to make a living.

A blurry beginning of what will define Generation Alpha is emerging, and is described in a recent article in *The Atlantic*. Some of Gen Alpha's (predicted) attributes will be:

- The best-educated generation ever
- The most technologically immersed
- The wealthiest (and I suspect the poorest, too)
- The one that has spent the most time as children living without both parents

- So racially diverse that the idea of racial division won't even exist for them

That last attribute is from another Gen Alpha article published last November in the *Huffington Post*—also a very enlightening read about the new generation, and also goes into a bit more detail about economic inequality (we can't all be millionaires, Mr. Reagan).

Will any of these educated predictions pan out? Stick around a quarter of a century and maybe we'll find out.

Losing—Then Finding—Heart

And while we're talking about your team, let's talk about energizing them. Admit it, sometimes during the busiest time of year the staff looks a little deflated, downtrodden and like they'd rather have a fork stuck in an eye rather than sell one more petunia. I came across this ARTICLE about reenergizing a team that has "lost heart."

The author starts off by not asking what went wrong with the employees, but what did the team or business leader do (or not do) to "suck the life out of energetic people?" Hmmm … interesting perspective, isn't it?

It goes on to explain the four things that the leader may or may not have done to cause the team to lose heart:

You only show up when you need something. Fix? Show up to give them something, to ask if they need anything or just to talk and get to know them.

You whip the horse for the entire race. That could totally happen in spring, and so could an exodus of people at a critical time. Fix? Celebrate progress and small victories along the way, and explore ways to work differently so there's not so much of a burden along the way.

You expect people to perform in an area of weakness. Fix? Ask employees what they enjoy or do best and have them do more of that, and ask them how much of what they don't enjoy could they continue to do and still find satisfaction with the job?

You minimize big challenges. Fix? Recognize the value in hard work—even if that work is easy for you but hard for someone else. Recognizing the value in the work means you recognize the value in the person.

Privacy, Pronto

That could have been another great name for the InstantHedge, a winner of one of the Direct Gardening Association's 2020 Green Thumb Awards. These awards are chosen by garden writers who judge both plants and products on uniqueness, technological innovation, ability to solve a garden problem and their appeal to gardeners.

The InstantHedge certainly solves the issue of needing privacy and darn quick. They are pre-grown, ready-to-plant European Beech hedges that offer the look of a mature hedge as soon as it is planted.



Available in two sizes (3-4 ft. tall and 5-6 ft. tall), these hedges are shipped in biodegradable boxes that can be planted directly into the ground, eliminating waste packaging. The hedges are also available in a few other tree/shrub varieties. Find them at instanthedge.com and coniferkingdom.com.

And speaking of keeping things private, a wall trellis from Gardener's Supply Company also won a Green Thumb award. The Vertex Wall Trellis not only lends support to whatever you might need to keep growing upward, it's also a good way to cover up a not-so-pretty wall or to hide a hurricane fence.



Made from rust-proof aluminum, the trellis is designed with a cool geometric pattern that makes it beautiful until whatever beautiful green thing you're growing covers it. The design also helps with airflow and helps limit the mildewing/rotting of the wall or structure it's covering. And at 97 inches tall, it's much taller than a lot of other support systems out there. Speaking of systems, the Vertex Wall Trellis is modular so you can link up several together to cover whatever space you need. Find it at www.Gardeners.com.

Reader Feedback Requested

A couple of weeks ago we asked for some reader input on a couple of questions for upcoming *Green Profit* articles. Thanks for your input! And yes, maybe you meant to reply and you didn't—that's just fine, there's still time! Here are those questions again:

- 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?

The fertilizer add-on strategy is one for BILL CALKINS, so drop him an email about it. And the houseplant department, well, that's me. Let me know how you've fine-tuned that department (or what problem you're struggling with!). Drop ME a line about it. Let's talk.

The Genius of Amanda

Leave it to Amanda Thomsen to generate and share a “lightbulb” idea. You know the kind—an idea that when you hear it you think, “Gee whiz, that’s so uncomplicated and engaging, why didn’t I think of that?”



Luckily, Amanda plays well with others and is happy to help all garden center folks figure out how to engage with customers. And if it’s on the socials, even better. Riffing on a social media calendar she created for the Garden Center Facebook group, she’s created a #GreenProfitChallenge for the month of March. Amanda has come up with a photo/post subject for each day in March to help you fill your Instagram and Facebook stream. And while the photos are meant to be inspirational for your customers (who isn’t inspired to come into your store when they see a post about #earlyspringblooms?), the posts are also meant to inspire all of us to get into the spring sales spirit.

That’s where the #GreenProfitChallenge hashtag comes it—use it in your posts and we can all see each other’s work and get/steal ideas. And the best part for you is not only do you get great ideas from your peers, but you also will likely see an uptick in followers, likes and the sale of the products you featured.

The challenge starts in just a matter of days. Here’s the list of subjects for each day:

MARCH 2020 *GREEN PROFIT* CHALLENGE

1	Early blooms	17	More shamrock-y
2	Signs of spring	18	More early blooms
3	Trees	19	Vegetables
4	Employee activity	20	What makes you special?
5	Succulents	21	Shrubs
6	Pots	22	New plants
7	Something shamrock-y	23	Video challenge: What just arrived
8	Mulch	24	Yard décor
9	Birds	25	The weather
10	Video challenge freestyle	26	More early blooms
11	Bulbs	27	Spring containers
12	New product	28	Video challenge: Store walk-through
13	Employee pick product	29	Spring hours and location
14	Houseplant help	30	A full wagon
15	Seeds	31	A full bench or end cap
16	Pollinators		

Need clarification? Amanda writes all about it in the February issue of *Green Profit*—check out the article HERE.

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



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