


A New Foliage Biz; PW's New Category; What Canadians Think



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- A new vanWingerden greenhouse
- Customers, products
- PW to launch houseplant line
- Canada's "Year of the Garden"
- Canada surveys gardeners
- SAF gets \$250k donation
- FTD rebrands
- The PP of the Y shirt
- Finally ...

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PLANT PRIDE & PROSPER




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It's always exciting (to me, anyway, as a greenhouse geek) to learn about a new greenhouse operation being run by members of the venerable Van Wingerden family. Aart and Cora Van Wingerden started it all when they came to the U.S. from Holland in 1948 with \$6 and three sons and started a greenhouse business in New Jersey; today there are countless (well, maybe somebody has counted, but I haven't) Van Wingerden operations around the country run by Aart's offspring, grandchildren and various branches of the family.

The Plant Company is the latest of these. Located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western Virginia, it's owned by Jason and Wesley vanWingerden*, sons of John vanWingerden of Green Circle Growers and Express Seed fame. Joining them is Frank Paul, Jason's brother-in-law and the former head grower of orchids for Green Circle. Together, they've put up 5 acres of state-of-the-art growing range and a 1.75-acre production building. They broke ground in January, started planting in May and sold their first plants in July.



Now THAT is a how you set up a new greenhouse operation. I'm told they have 50 acres to expand on.

What makes this operation stand out is the crop: foliage! Yes, these vanWingerdens have dedicated themselves exclusively to trendy houseplants. And they're doing it with a distinctly European flair, producing the highest quality possible, year-round. They're doing it all themselves, too, from liners to finished plants.

To learn more, I caught up with Jason via phone while he was in the Netherlands, visiting breeders and others to source genetics and build relationships. He only had a few minutes to spare, so I cut to the chase: "Why houseplants and why Virginia?"

"About two and a half, three years ago, my brother and I decided we wanted to get into the foliage business. We saw a need ... and, obviously, there's a lot bigger need today than there was three years ago. We saw a need to do things a little bit differently, similar to how my dad had a vision for orchids ... we wanted to do it with more of a European approach to quality and consistency."



Wesley, Frank and Jason.

The choice of location was, believe it or not, based on climate.

"We wanted to find an area to where the climate was a better fit for foliage, to where it's not so far south where you get the extreme heat during the summertime – that's why we picked Virginia, up in the Blue Ridge Mountains ... a higher elevation, better night temps during the summertime."

**Various Van Wingerdens handle the "van" portion of their name differently; I do my best to write it the way they prefer.*



Customers, products

The guys' plan is to have a strong focus on the independent garden center channel while also investigating interest from grocery chains and mass market retailers that appreciate their unique approach to the houseplant market.

"We said we would focus on quality, and then find the partners who are interested in that quality, rather than focusing on a specific segment," Jason says. In other words, customers who care more about quality than price.

I asked Jason how they'd be sourcing genetics. After all, one of the challenges of growing foliage is finding the starter material in the first place. How do they do that if they want to be unique?

"The important thing is finding good partners, whether it be brokers or smaller (TC) labs," he says. That's also one of the reasons we're in Europe right now, meeting with different breeders, trying to create long-term relationships."





As for varieties, they're starting out with two lines; Premium and Boutique. Premium are the bread-and-butter varieties; Boutique are those hard-to-get and also hard-to-grow items. Right now their [website](#) lists 15 varieties, including alocasia, clusia, ctenanthe (a calathea relative), monstera, philodendron, sanseveria, strelizia and syngonium. There's also a line called H2O Sprouts, which are rooted cuttings in water in stylish glass containers of various sizes. It was developed in conjunction with another family business, VDE Plant in the Netherlands.

As for how they'll reach customers with these products ...

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**FOUR
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Proven Winners and The Plant Company to offer unique houseplants exclusively under the Proven Winners brand

How's that for burying the lede?

But that's how I learned that The Plant Company exists, through Marshall Dirks of Proven Winners, who, you will recall, filled me in on PW's new offices last week. Marshall told me he wanted to mention a new deal he had cooking, but it wasn't finalized; he was finally able to give me the details this week while the ink was still wet on the agreement. Director of Sales Dave Konsoer sent me the attached photos and the release with the above headline, from which I snipped the following info.

With so many new gardeners entering the marketplace and millions of Millennials coming of age as homeowners, a Proven Winners houseplant program would be a natural brand extension. Plus, unlike annuals, perennials and shrubs, houseplants are a year-round offering. They'd been collecting foliage genetics for a number of years and were actively looking for a production partner to give the brand access to the very hot houseplant market.

Enter The Plant Company. When Dave met the guys and saw their facilities and production, he knew immediately it was the makings of a strong partnership.

For The Plant Company, they receive immediate access to the Proven Winners brand and marketing programs, synergies with existing Proven Winners licensees, their retail support programs, and inclusion in Proven Winners' trade and consumer marketing campaigns. Plus, they'll be able to tap into Proven Winners' direct-to-consumer e-commerce expertise and platforms.

Added Jason when we spoke, "We actually have a brand name backing us up who is able to explain our story to the breeders, to where they're incentivized to give us those exclusives to bring to market."

Said Dave of the new partnership, "The garden plant market—including annuals, perennials, flowering shrubs and trees, and caladiums—has been the strength of the Proven Winners brand. By bringing a strong and up-and-coming houseplant supplier into the Proven Winners family, consumers will be able to find top-quality houseplants under a name they know and trust, resulting in an even stronger brand for retailers and consumers."

When will all the fun begin? January 1, at which point The Plant Company will begin to sell their entire finished houseplant line of over 100 items exclusively under the Proven Winners brand. New items and sizes will be added continually.

I was curious if the other Proven Winners propagators (Pleasant View Gardens, Four Star Greenhouse, Nordic Nurseries and Sobkowich Greenhouses) might jump into the foliage business, too, with liners from The Plant Company. Dave said that discussions are in the works and each company will determine for themselves whether they'll sell these items in the near future.

Big news, eh? But I've still got questions about the new foliage operation. So I'm scheduling a trip to Virginia to check it out in person. Stay tuned for that!

In the meantime, if you've got questions, you can email [Dave Konsoer](#) or [Chris Ricci](#), director of sales for The Plant Company.

And email [ME](#) with your thoughts on how the deal might impact the foliage world.



Canada to celebrate 2022 as “Year of the Garden” (“Année du jardin”)

This big idea is courtesy of the Canadian Garden Council, via their Gardens Canada website. It's to be “a centennial celebration of our horticulture sector, [which] will commemorate Canada's rich garden heritage, celebrate today's vibrant garden culture and create important legacies for a sustainable future.”

The centennial they speak of is the 100th anniversary of the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association (CNLA). Intriguingly, the Canadian horticulture sector—which includes the members of CNLA, Flowers Canada and Quebec Fert, plus garden clubs, public gardens and affiliated businesses—calls itself the “garden family.” I like that!

They explain further on the website: “Passion for gardening has never been more evident than during the COVID-19 pandemic as families sheltered at home and turned their yards into practical and beautiful garden sanctuaries. As the country recovers, The Year of the Garden 2022 will mark an important period for Canadians of all ages to learn more about growing, enjoying and experiencing gardening and gardens, and all of the vital quality of life benefits they provide.”



They've asked Parliament for an official designation of the celebration.

Planning is already underway for a year of various “Live the Garden Life” activities, celebrations, special events and promotions that will take place in communities, schools, businesses, public gardens and backyard gardens across Canada. The organizers are encouraging every garden-related business to take part and get involved. There will be a full calendar of events, loads of opportunities to participate and lend a hand ... they'll even be using it as an opportunity to promote careers in horticulture.

Check out their [WEBSITE](#) to learn more.

Hey, maybe we can do something down here in the States? Then again, let's go even bigger and make EVERY year the year of the garden!



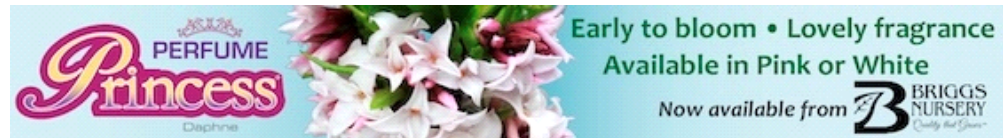
What Canadians think about gardening

In 2020, the Canadian Garden Council hired Nanos Research to [survey](#) Canadians' level of interest in gardening and explore their gardening preferences. To that end, last November, they conducted a telephone and online survey of 1,096 Canadians 18 years of age or older. While their findings are now a year old, chances are the results are still accurate and applicable.

Key findings:

- Four in five Canadians support (50%) or somewhat support (30%) designating 2022 as the Year of the Garden for the Centennial of the birth of Canada's Horticulture industry.
- More than four in five Canadians expect to spend the same time (66%) or more time (21%) gardening in 2021 compared to 2020.

- Younger Canadians are twice as likely to say they expect to spend more time gardening in 2021 than older Canadians.
- More than eight in 10 Canadians agree (55%) or somewhat agree (29%) that gardening can have a positive impact on climate change.
- A strong majority of Canadians agree (70%) or somewhat agree (26%) that gardening can improve their mental and physical health.



Canadian gardening personas

The survey results continued:

- **Avid gardener.** One in six Canadians (17%) describe themselves as avid gardeners, where gardening is part of who they are. Canadians aged 55-plus (20%) were twice as likely to describe themselves as avid gardeners than those aged 18 to 34 (10%).
- **Fair-weather gardener.** More than three in 10 Canadians (31%) say a fair-weather gardener best describes them when it comes to gardening, as they like gardening as a side hobby.
- **New gardener.** Twelve percent of Canadians describe themselves as new gardeners that just started this year (2020). Younger Canadians (18 to 34 years old), at 16%, are more likely to describe themselves as new gardeners than Canadians 55-plus (8%).
- **Lapsed gardener.** Just over one in five Canadians (22%) describe themselves as lapsed gardeners, where they gardened in the past, but do not currently garden.
- **Not interested at all.** Nineteen percent of Canadians are not interested at all in gardening. Men (23%) were more likely to say that they were not interested at all in gardening than woman (16%).

Personally, I like this next statistic best—it's one I'd be putting in front of Parliament:

- **Four out of five Canadians agree (42%) or somewhat agree (39%) that every student should be taught the life skill of gardening in a school setting.**

Hear, hear!

Read the full survey report [HERE](#).



SAF receives \$250k donation for marketing, education

Herman Meinders, founder of American Floral Services, one of the largest international wire services, has donated \$250,000 to the **Society of American Florists** (SAF) to encourage careers in the floral and horticultural industries, educate florists and help the industry promote the awareness and sale of cut flowers, plants and floral-related products.

Herman started American Floral Services in a garage apartment in 1970 with 137 florist subscribers in his first directory. Within 15 years, the service had grown to more than 17,000 subscribers. He sold the business in 1994, and in 2000, it merged with Teleflora, where Herman, 85, is chairman emeritus. He's the 2000 recipient of the Paul Ecke Jr. Award, and in 2012, was inducted into SAF's Floriculture Hall of Fame.

"The floral industry was very good to me," he says. "It's important to take care of those that take care of you. That's why I give to the floral industry."

Marketing and recruitment have always been important to Herman, and he sees that these are two big challenges for florists right now, which is why a portion of the donation will be used for those efforts.

"This donation will go a long way to help SAF attract talent to our industry, educate florists and keep our industry and flowers in the forefront of consumers' minds," said SAF President Michelle Castellano Keeler.



FTD rebrands

Speaking of the floral world, the venerable wire service brand **FTD** has rebranded for the modern era, but while harkening back to its founding in 1910 as a non-profit florist cooperative. The rebranding includes a redesigned version of its iconic Mercury Man logo and updated branding across packaging, as well as a "fresh and focused" product assortment and an "elegantly modern" website that provides an "intuitive and streamlined shopping experience," said FTD in its press release announcing the news.



Adweek magazine covered the rebranding and they quoted Annelies De Rouck, FTD's chief creative officer, as saying, "Rebrands are typically viewed as a reinvention and it's not often that you have such a rich story like FTD's to work with. For us, the real challenge here was determining how to fit 111 years of history into one clear and concise brand story that would resonate with both our customers and our florists ... It is not a 'new FTD' in the sense of us wanting to do away with the old. It's a timeless positioning that is still 100% relevant today. It just needed to be dusted off a bit."



Wear the Perennial Plant of the Year

If you really love little bluestem, you'll want to express your passion for the Perennial Plant Association's 2022 Perennial Plant of the Year by purchasing a fundraising t-shirt. (Proceeds go to the support the association.)



The t-shirts, which sport pretty artwork of *Schizachyrium scoparium*, are great for garden center staff, landscape teams or anyone who loves plants! Sizes run from kids to the biggest guy on your crew. Adult sizes start at \$35, children's sizes are \$25. Credit goes to Alex Stanley and Hoffman Nursery for this year's design.

Click [HERE](#) to order and show your support for the PPA and its PP of the Y.

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

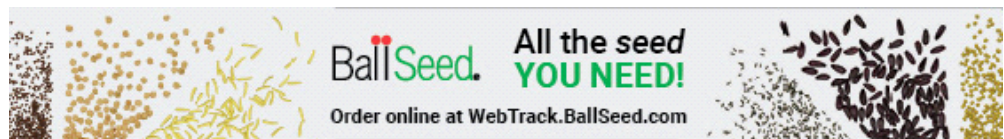


Finally ...

Where's Chris? For a change, not in my palatial office on the 95th floor of Ball Publishing Tower. No, I'm off to my first visit to Tucson, Arizona, for the annual meeting of the National Greenhouse Manufacturer's Association (of which I am a member of the Board).

While in Tucson, I'll be touring the University of Arizona's Controlled Environment Agriculture Center (CEAC). And I'll be dropping in on my friends Tom Birt and Cathy Bishop, owners of Mesquite Valley Growers Nursery, one of the finest garden centers in the country—or so Tom tells me ;). Tom and Cathy have traveled to garden centers around the world with the International Garden Center Association; that's how I met them. So I'll be curious to see how they brought ideas from France, Ireland, Japan, Australia, England and other countries to the desert.

Stay tuned for reports on both visits!



See you next time!

Chi

Chris Beytes

Editor

GrowerTalks and *Green Profit*

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