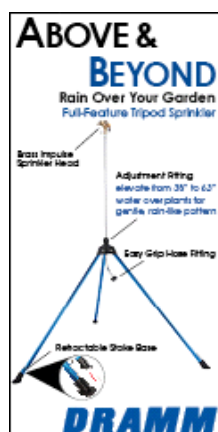


TPIE, plus touring some Tampa plant shops



FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 2022

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Green Profit's
buzz!
Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

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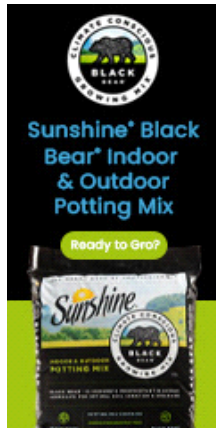


Seeing Plants in Person

I am writing most of this edition either while enjoying a warm breeze and sunny Florida skies or while flying away from warmth and headed back to cold and icy New England. I'm in Tampa, Florida, this week for the much-awaited Tropical Plant International Expo—much awaited because the show was virtual for 2021. And as a reminder, TPPIE is in Tampa this year and at least the next year (and maybe another) due to construction happening at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale, the show's usual haunt.

I have a lot to cover this week, as I did a lot! Plant shops, garden centers, trade show floor—I got around. I'll cover one quick thing from each store and a few easy but important things from the trade show.

I'll start *Buzz* where I started this week, which was a visit to a houseplant shop in the North Hyde Park neighborhood of Tampa called The Plant Shop. Owned by Richie Ash, a farm-raised North



Carolinian, he started in the houseplant biz part time with a 10 ft. x 10 ft. booth at a market in Ybor City in 2020. He found a brick-and-mortar location in November 2020 and opened in the current location in January 2021. About 2,000 people attended his opening weekend—what a thrill that must have been! In fact, his operations manager, Geo Ciecierski, was one of those customers. When you love plants, you just love plants and maybe even make a career out of it.



What's my take-home from Richie, Geo and The Plant Shop? It's that they believe that keeping plants accessible means keeping them affordable. These 8-in. Monstera deliciosa and Ficus lyrata are just \$29 apiece (without the deco pot). Keeping them priced for purchase means folks keep coming back. Couple that with attention to customer service and plant parent education and you get a loyal customer base.





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Bloom Garden Shop

Next stop on my 8-mile walk around Tampa was Bloom Garden Shop. I met up with Julie Lohoefer, co-owner with her husband Chad, and I feel I have a friend for life I—enjoyed my time there so much. The store is on property that was a former gas station. And get this—they moved to this location after their rented former gas station location was sold.





It sure was nice to see some color and feel some warmth!

My quick take-home from Julie is that Millennials are to be embraced. In fact, I think she called the sales from this demographic “outrageous” and the customers themselves her favorite customers to serve. They are acting like a bridge between typical sales peaks. For instance, August can be a slow month in southern Florida, what with all the heat and humidity and folks leaving for the mountains of North Carolina. The Millennials stick around town, they keep decorating with containers, they keep coming in.



Julie also taught me about Gasparilla, a Tampa-area event that she describes resembling a mini Mardi Gras but celebrating the (unsubstantiated) pirates that came into the bay to take over the city. Folks especially in her 'hood want to decorate their home with all things beads and bling, from houseplants to custom indoor and outdoor containers. Otherwise, you're leaving money on the table. Can't wait to follow up with her to see how the invasion turns out (maybe it'll be another Super Bowl celebration).



Leafy Luv Affair

Julie suggested I head to a new plant shop in Tampa's affluent Hyde Park neighborhood, a place with familiar shop names such as Lululemon and Anthropologie as well as locally known high-end stores. Leafy Luv Affair fit right into the shopping scene with price points that were, I'm guessing, 15% higher or more than those for similar items in the previous two stores. From what I could tell, the neighborhood could absorb it.



The shop was indeed leafy—packed to the gills, nicely of course, with tropical foliage and houseplants of all sizes. Also inside was Whitney Jackson, co-owner along with her husband Matt. This was another plant store that had opened during the pandemic, but by New York tech industry, tired-of-the-rat-race ex-pats rather than a farm-raised fellow from NC.



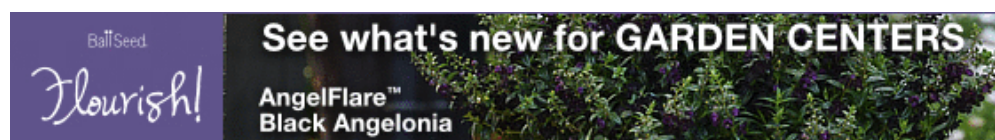


Some of the pricier plants on their rare plant shelf.

My take-home from Leafy Luv Affair was not a display or product but the audacity of authenticity. What I mean by that is they truly felt these are valuable products and these are the prices, rather than worrying if they were asking too much. How bold! My conversations with Whitney and a staff person led me to the same conclusion—they know their stuff, they're educating their customers and they're darn proud of their worth. Bless this generation's belief in themselves.



I'll have more about all four of these folks in upcoming issues of *Buzz* and *Tropical Topics*, so stay tuned! But meanwhile, check out this local [TV NEWS](#) piece featuring Whitney and Matt.



Kerby's

My last retailer stop of the week was to Kerby's Nursery, a longstanding member of The Garden Center Group. I'll include more details of my visit here in an upcoming "On the Road" segment in *Green Profit*, but I wanted to share an idea from Kerby's with you to inspire you for the upcoming Valentine's Day holiday.

Several years ago Kim and Joey Bokor attend one of the GCG's Fall Events and saw a garden center that had created walls—maybe even "houses"—from pumpkins. They were so inspired

they went home and set about making a frame for a wall of pumpkins of their own.

But why constrain the framework to just one season or holiday? Kim had the brilliant idea of using the frame for any and all seasonal displays.



Got a pumpkin wall? Use it for other holidays!

Here it is in its Valentine's Day glory. It's a popular spot of family photos and selfies, and they are sure to include prompts to tag Kerby's on any social media posts.

Anyone else doing something similar? Drop me a note about it at ewells@ballpublishing.com. And so you know, I'll have more about all four of these shops in upcoming issues of *Green Profit*, *Buzz* and *Tropical Topics*, so stay tuned!



leafjoy

I did have one more visit, and it wasn't to a retailer but to an off-site display of Proven Winners' new leafjoy houseplant program. Dave Konsoer was kind enough to take me through some of the program's latest developments.

One of those developments is that Proven Winners is categorizing the different varieties into collections. The purpose is to educate the consumer about where a particular plant would best thrive. The Atrium Collection is for high-light locations; Cocoon Collection for low-light interior rooms; the WorkLife Collection are low-profile, small-space plants for desks and tabletops; and the SpaScene Collection for humidity-loving plants.



Photographers were shooting lifestyle imagery for the different collection tags when I stopped by the off-site leafjoy display.

I asked about pot requirements. For now the collection will be available in the tan-brown pots that their grower-partner The Plant Company has been using for production. PW did some social media surveying and found that consumers actually really appreciated the not-nursery-pot look of it. I think a new program in a completely different category would be an opportune time to expand the brand's look. We will see what happens. Meanwhile, I have one or two other news items to share about leafjoy for upcoming issues. Again, stay tuned!



Keynote

And this brings me—finally—to the main reason for my trip to Florida. I'll start at the beginning of the show, which is always a mind-transformative keynote sponsored by the good people at LiveTrends Design Group. This year's speaker was Duncan Wardle, the former Head of Innovation

& Creativity at Disney, who spoke on “Embedding a Culture of Innovation into Everyone’s DNA.” And let me tell you, he sure did make the audience get creative! For instance he made us role play around jobs as sex therapists for bees and designers of parachutes for elephants. Hot and heavy topics.

It’s not just “kidding around.” It’s getting our minds out of ruts we create that stifle new ideas and new opportunities. Thinking in a different manner takes us from a “no, that’s not possible” attitude to a “yes, and ...” outlook. A “what if” brainstorming session among colleagues could take a car wash from a boring concept to the idea of an “auto spa.” Who wouldn’t want to go to a spa, right?



This creative “yes and” and “what if” thinking process also takes something like a Blockbuster-type video rental business to a Netflix, a Barnes & Noble to an Amazon, a Disneyland to a Disney+ streaming service—which did smashingly well during COVID shutdowns, Duncan added.

Again, stay tuned for other insights from the creative and playful mind of Duncan Wardle.



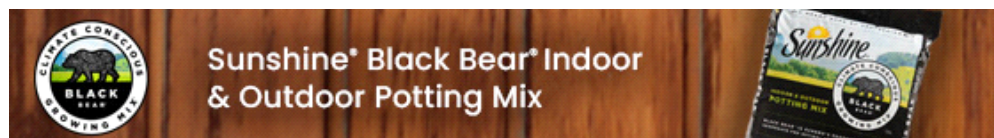
Favorite New Flowering Plant

There were a bevy of booth awards given out this year at TPIE—and in new categories, too!—but I’ll get to those in another edition of a newsletter. For now, I’ll share the news of the items that won the crowd’s blessing in three “People’s Choice”-style categories.

First up is the Favorite New Flowering Plant, and that goes to *Anthurium magnificum* Michelle from Living Color Nursery.



This particular variety was developed by physician-horticulturist Dr. Jeff Block of Miami with a breeding emphasis on durable leaves with dark green, red and purple hues and a velvety sheen. This variety's got all that, for sure. The underside of the leaf is bred for lighter colors. And notice just how unnoticeable the "flower" is on this flowering plant. I had to do a double take to make sure I had the plant listed under the correct category.



Favorite New Foliage Plant

As for Favorite New Foliage Plant, that honor goes to *Geogenanthus ciliates* from Costa Farms. Take a look at those glistening near-black leaves! They were darker in person, believe me. Cameras can never truly capture it (at least not mine).



Pen for size comparison.

Here's Costa's one-line description of the plant: "Here's a plant that really excites consumers, both for its exotic appearance and because it's a new genus most have never heard of before!" Notice how Costa makes the plant about the customer, and not about the plant itself. We're selling it, after all, so the emphasis really should be on offering stuff that appeals to consumers.



Favorite New Product

The Favorite New Product Award goes to a company that solved a very important problem. Xaxim Pots look like they may be a coir product, but they are actually made out of palm tree waste.



Did you know that during the harvest of palm trees to retrieve the heart of palm, only 3% of the palm tree is used? That means 97% of the tree is waste. What to do with all that palm fiber material? Process it, use a biodegradable product to "glue" the material together and create pots.

They not only use waste material, they also are biodegradable products themselves. Plant roots readily grow into the containers, and it's also a plantable pot that will eventually biodegrade. These are made from a company called BioFink out of Brazil.

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



Something I Thought Was Cool

I'll wait until next week to share with you the 15 different products/ideas that won The Garden Center Group's Cool Product Awards, but for now I want to share a product that caught my eye. These are Plant Pockets, from Ecological Protective Solutions.



EPS has been making erosion control products, Dredgesox, out knitted high-density polyethylene mesh for 23 years or so (their first erosion control installs are still intact, so that speaks to the longevity of the product). These bags are made from the same or similar material for both consumer and grower/nursery applications. On the consumer side, folks can either plant directly into the bag or use it as a decorative nursery pot covering. On the grower side, planting directly into the bags adds the benefit of airflow to the roots, which makes the roots and plants healthier and larger—30-40% bigger, EPS has found.

They offer a bunch of different sizes—3-, 4-, 6-in and 1-gal. bags plus custom sizing—all of which can expand due to the nature of the material. I also like the vertical Plant Pockets, which I believe have grommets for easy hanging. What I like about these bags is the coloring and texture, which reminds me of nature grass or jute material, but with greater durability. Oh, and they are washable, reusable and made in the U.S., too.

Finally ...

Forget bite-sized Starbursts and Snickers. Lure customers into your booth not with a bowl of candy but with a puppy or two.



Hands down, Bethel Farms was my favorite booth because the grass and sod company out of Arcadia, Florida, brought in adorable squirmly puppies. Ivy was just one of three pups brought in by the [Humane Society of Tampa Bay](#) on Thursday (they brought in other pups from different organizations on Wednesday and Friday), although I suspect she won't be there for long. I was very much missing my dogs during this trip, and to see a pettable pup just brought joy to my heart.

So why was Ivy and her pals part of the exhibit? Bethel Farms has a product called GottaGo Grass, which is essentially interlocking square trays of natural grass (Bermuda, I believe) where Fido can go when nature calls.



It's a great idea for condo or townhouse dwellers with limited outdoor space. In fact, my apartment-dwelling friend Rachel in Portland, Oregon, had this product or something similar for her dog Sophie, who is a shy and skiddish spaniel in a city setting. It looks like there's an option for a subscription service for these grass squares, too. Kinda cool.

Questions, comments, suggestions? Drop me a line if you'd like at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



Ellen Wells
Senior Editor
Green Profit

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