

Eco+ Grande, casual furniture, trials, fall gardening and something 'BBIG'



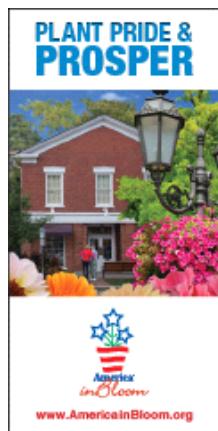
THURSDAY, AUGUST 10, 2023

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SMARTER MARKETING



Eco+ Grande Update & New NJ Law

We're continuing our Cultivate'23 coverage with the report on Proven Winners' updated Eco+ Grande and a new New Jersey plastics law. Take it away, Jen Polanz!

At Cultivate'23 my first stop was at the Proven Winners booth to get an update on new offerings. While there, I caught up with Danny Mishek, president of Vista Tek, the Stillwater, Minnesota-based company that manufactures Proven Winners' Eco+ Grande compostable pot (for more on the origins of the pot, [click here and scroll to the bottom](#)). He told me about a new law coming into effect in New Jersey that requires rigid plastic containers to have a minimum of 10% post-consumer recycled content, and the percentage will continue to increase until it reaches 50% in 2036. [Here's a link](#) with some of those details, including an FAQ that shows key dates for the law.

Danny's focus was on improving the Eco+ Grande pots to be more user-friendly and enhance its

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appeal to a wider audience of growers, retailers and consumers so growers who ship to multiple states can avoid these regulations overall.

They shipped more than 3 million pots last year, and listened to feedback and user data from Proven Winners customers to improve them for this year. The old pots had four tabs that could be pulled off at the bottom in smaller sections. The new pots have two large tabs that, when pulled off, expose almost the entire bottom of the plant to the soil or media, creating more contact area for the roots. They also changed the tag lock to be more recessed. Danny said they continue to keep refining the design and will roll out larger sizes, too, for larger annuals and perennials.



Danny Mishek, president of Vista Tek, holds this year's version of the Eco+ Grande pot for Proven Winners.

"I'm so proud that the company is offering this value proposition and people want that value now," he added.

I'm curious to hear if your state has enacted or is considering legislation mandating post-consumer recycled content in rigid pots. [Email me](#) and let me know!



Speaking of Pots From Recycled Materials

Decorative pot manufacturer Bunnik Creations is a vendor I love to visit while at the Tropical Plant International Expo, and I don't recall seeing them at past Cultivate shows, but here they were with some great wares. What caught my eye in the Bunnik booth this time around were the number of different pots using natural and recycled materials. Take this deco pot, for example.

Recycled tires! Love the look.



I noticed other pots created from recycled paper, sustainable bamboo and recycled fabric. Here in Boston they just started mandating the recycling of fabrics and textiles of all sorts. May as well use this stuff for something, right, so why not deco pots?

Bunnik also has newish software that can pinpoint exactly what pot sizes, colors and materials are trending in your area. It's more complicated than that and I am sure I am not conveying the information correctly. However, rest assured it's a tool that will help you choose the products that will sell, not just the products you think customers will buy (which often is dependent on what you would buy, am I right?). Contact [Bunnik](#) and get the scoop on what will work for you.



Getting Casual

Jackie Hirschhaut, Executive Director of the International Casual Furnishings Association, wrote in with a review of July's Casual Market Atlanta trade show, the first time the ICFA has held its show in Atlanta. More than 150 manufacturers and importers were there, so there was a ton to see! Noting that 80% of consumers are reporting that their outdoor living space is "more valuable to them than ever," Jackie said that consumers are intent on creating an exterior room that feels like an escape from the pressures of their daily lives.

With that in mind, here are a few trends and products that Jackie said caught a lot of buzz. Here they are in Jackie's own words:

Not Your Mother's Umbrella

The classic shade product that is often a focal point of many outdoor spaces goes high-tech for 2024 with the sleek Sunvilla Powered Market Umbrella. The simple canopy is easily raised and lowered with a simple click on the mobile app that operates a slim battery attached to the pole. A solar panel atop the umbrella recharges the device, which can also provide uplighting. Now, it's an absolute breeze to not only adjust your umbrella but also add a layer of ambience to your outdoor setting.



Best of Show

As a complement to a variety of basic seating options, the most interesting occasional tables for the out of doors successfully mimic popular indoor looks. Bernhardt Exteriors earned the Lillian B. Winchester Best of Show award with a simulated *faux bois* motif to create an organic outdoor look. Constructed in cast aluminum, the Milos cocktail table features intertwined branches of a tree while the Cypress side table resembles a slender tree trunk. Mixed media is still a popular trend, and the glass-reinforced concrete tabletops are shown in a bone finish, paired with shiny nickel bases for an elegant flair.



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Fire Pits Gain in Popularity

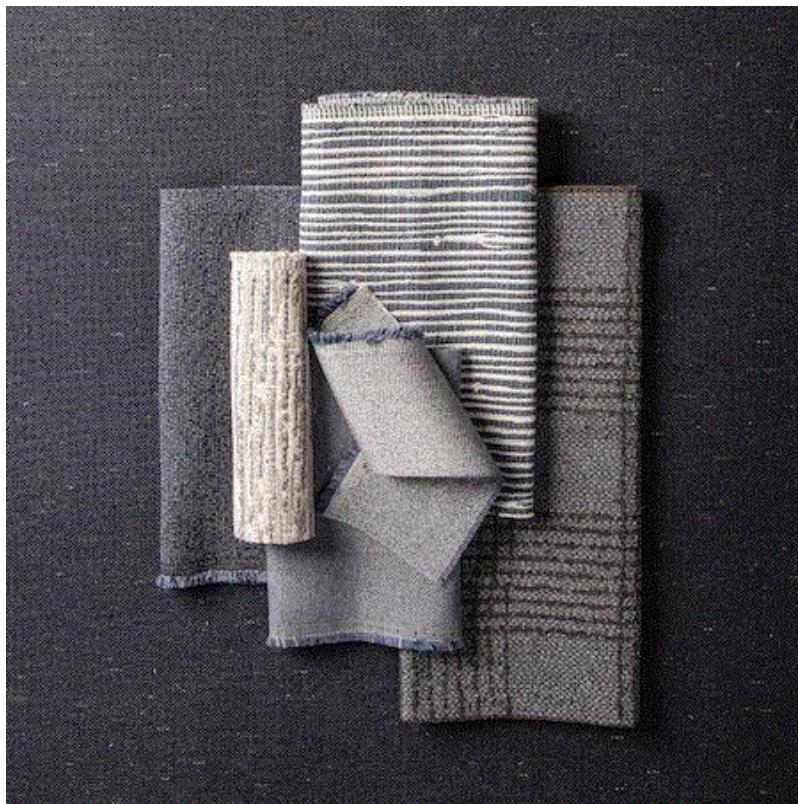
(continued coverage of the Casual Market Atlanta)

Interest has increased in outdoor fire pits over the past few years. It's not unusual to see an exquisite fire feature as the central component of many outdoor seating arrangements. In a unique upscale approach for next year, Ocean Rock USA utilized a single porcelain slab over a metal frame for its Carrara Marble Porcelain Fire Table. The construction creates a work of art through the seamless connection of all veining patterns on the surface. The maintenance-free unit turns into a coffee table with a porcelain lid that can be in place at all times or tucked underneath with a special sliding storage system when burning.



Outdoor Performance Fabrics with an Eco-Friendly Edge

Legendary outdoor furnishings designer Richard Frinier translated the restorative practice of rebalancing our internal energy through connecting with the earth in a new line of cushion and pillow fabrics. He has created Strada Sky for Sunbrella, with an irregular striated pattern that reflects the ever-changing appearance and movement of clouds in the sky in tandem with a cross-section of the earth's rock sediments. Utilizing recycled solution-dyed acrylic yarns, the result is a unique performance fabric that personifies the rhythm and balance of nature in a wide range of hues.



Jackie feels that retailers and designers have significantly expanded their offerings through the casual and furnishings and outdoor furniture showrooms at AmericasMart Atlanta. You should go to the next Casual Market Atlanta and not miss a thing to offer to your customers! It takes place July 15-18, 2024. Find more info and register [HERE](#).



From Trade Shows to Trials

Trial season is at its peak. Plantpeddler in Cresco, Iowa, hosted its Variety Day 2023 last Friday. As always, their goal is to "test the best in the Midwest." And with nearly 1,500 varieties in containers, baskets and beds, their job is certainly cut out for the Plantpeddler trialing team!

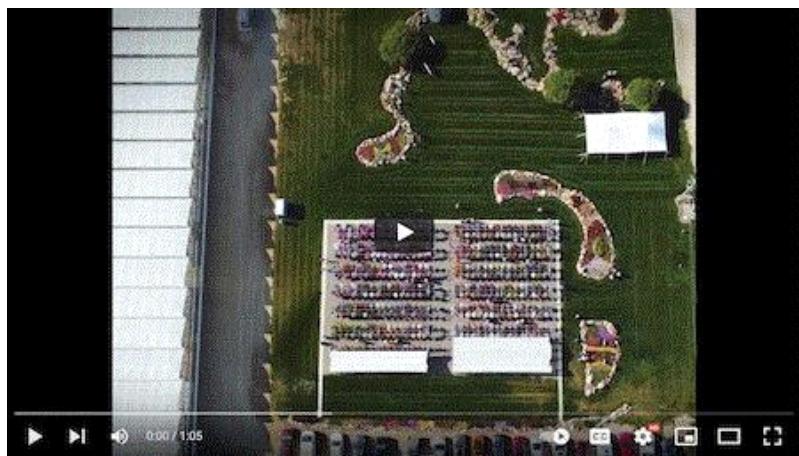
But on Variety Day, they hand the assessments over to the visitors, who are given the opportunity to vote for their favorite three varieties. The Top 25 were dominated (10 out of 25) by begonias, as has been the custom recently.

Without further ado, the Top 25 as chosen by the visitors to Plantpeddler's Variety Day 2023 are:

1. Begonia l'Conia First Kiss Del Sol, Dümmen Orange

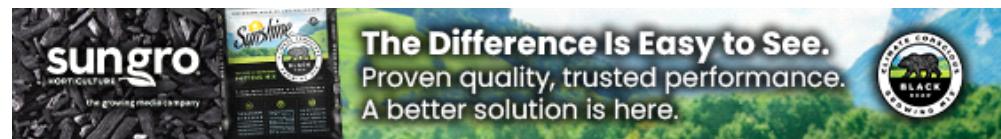
2. Calibrachoa Calitastic Cappuccino, Westhoff
3. Bracteantha Granvia Crimson Sun, Suntory
4. Begonia Fragrant Falls Peach, Beekenkamp
5. Begonia Adora Velvet Red, Syngenta Flowers
6. Bracteantha Granvia Gold, Suntory
7. Calibrachoa Ombre Pink, Danziger
8. Begonia l'Conia Lemon Berry, Dümmen Orange
9. Impatiens SunPatiens Compact Red Candy Bicolor, Sakata
10. Begonia Florencio Cerise, Syngenta Flowers
11. Verbena Lascar Mango Orange, Selecta One
12. Petunia Itsy Pink, Syngenta Flowers
13. Portulaca Mega Pazzaz Mango Twist, Danziger
14. Begonia Encanto Pink, Beekenkamp
15. Petunia Flower Shower Ringo Star, Westhoff
16. Begonia hiemalis Valentino White, Koppe
17. Begonia l'Conia Portofino Sunrise, Dümmen Orange
18. Begonia hiemalis Belove Rose, Koppe
19. Begonia Florencio Pink, Syngenta Flowers
20. Portulaca Mega Pazzaz Purple, Danziger
21. Dianthus Capitan Magnifica, Selecta One
22. Petunia Crazytunia Black & White, Westhoff
23. Begonia l'Conia First Kiss Orange Dümmen Orange
24. Petunia Flower Shower Golden Harvest, Westhoff
25. Verbena Vanessa Bicolor Indigo, Danziger

Wanna see what 1,500 varieties looks like? Check out Plantpeddler's [VIDEO](#) and you'll agree it is colorful!



Before you know it, Plantpeddler will be hosting its Poinsettia Variety Day. That is happening on November 30. Contact stacyb@plantpeddler.com for more information.

What trials have you visited this summer and what new varieties will you put on your wish list for next year? Drop me a note about it [HERE](#).



Espoma's New Fertilizer Plant

Colleague Jen Polanz interviewed The Espoma Company President Jeremy Brunner as they

finish their new Pennsylvania processing facility.

The Espoma Company has been producing organic fertilizer for the lawn and garden market for nearly 100 years, but for much of that time they relied on outside suppliers to dry and pelletize their inputs, while they did the bulk screening, blending and packaging at the Millville, New Jersey, facility.

Now, the company is in the process of finishing a new, state-of-the-art, 60,000 sq. ft. processing facility in Hegins, Pennsylvania, which will give them the ability to dry, blend and granulate organic ingredients into prilled fertilizer (see the photo for an example of prilled product).



I recently chatted with President Jeremy Brunner to find out more details. My first question was “why Hegins?” It’s in proximity to major egg farms in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, area, he answered, which offers bulk poultry waste that can be dried and pasteurized for organic fertilizer. The past several years—even before the pandemic—have been challenging for sourcing materials, he said, and this way they are in charge of their own destiny. “Rather than relying on other companies to bring it in, we can do it ourselves,” he said.

That not only benefits The Espoma Company, but also the poultry farms and the surrounding

waterways, as Espoma will be removing millions of pounds of raw materials and diverting them from land application, which can cause nutrient runoff in nearby waterways (including the Susquehanna River, which empties into Chesapeake Bay).

Another benefit of the plant is the equipment is designed to create more uniform, less dusty, "prilled" fertilizer that can be used in conventional spreaders. The factory is expected to start up by the end of the year, so retail customers will likely still see product from current suppliers until early next year.

It will be a rolling transition, and the new factory may even open up new opportunities for additional product offerings. Jeremy noted bulk options like truckloads and totes will be available in the future, as well as more lawn- and turf-focused products. But, the first year will be heavily focused on fulfilling current products.



Fall Gardening and Front Yards

Our friends at National Garden Bureau have our backs when it comes to trends. You may have seen the tropical and foliage trendspotting tip they included in this week's *Tropical Topics* (read it [HERE](#) if you haven't seen it yet). They'll be doing the same here in *buzz!* on a somewhat regular basis (thank you, [NGB](#)!).

Today's trendspotting tips are gathered from a 30-day search of certain terms on Pinterest. According to NGB, Pinterest searches for each of the following terms are up 20%-400%:

- Front yards: up 400%
- Fall gardening: up 200%
- Fall garden vegetables: up 100%
- How to dry basil leaves: up 20%

In a 90-day period, these key search terms have also seen some higher-than-normal activity:

- Colorful plants: up 119%
- Fall planters: up 76%
- Woodland gardens: up 49%
- Front yard landscape layout: up 22%

It's not just Pinterest that is noting these trends. NGB's Diane Blazek mentioned a recent Monrovia survey found similar results in regard to the interest in front yard gardens. I asked Monrovia's Chief Marketing Officer and trend spotter Katie Tamony about that. "Our most recent consumer survey asked 1,400 homeowners across the country about their interest in outdoor projects," Katie said. "We found that 31% of those surveyed said they are interested in redoing their front yards. That is up 4% from 2022, which tells us homeowners have a greater interest in their front yard overall."

Have you noticed customers doing more with their front yards this summer? Or asking about fall gardening? You might want to share [NGB's webinar on Fall Container Combos](#)—or watch it and get some pointers yourself!

If Pinners are searching for it, you know they are planning to act on this term within the next month and a half. "Pinners are planners," is what Diane tells me. They "start searching on Pinterest twice as early as on other platforms. So at least 30-45 days ahead of time except for holidays (Christmas, Thanksgiving, etc.)—that can be six months ahead."

I can't wait to see what other trends NGB gathers from Pinterest! And they've promised me these

will all be actionable by you, the garden retailer, to stay ahead of what your customers may be asking you for in the coming weeks. If you stay prepared, you don't have to rush around when that time comes!



What's Looking Great

Some may be searching for how to dry basil, but I'm taking advantage of the fresh stuff while I have it. Continuing with the informal "what's looking great in our gardens" segment, the Pesto Party Basil, a Burpee exclusive, is about as terrific a basil plant as I have ever grown.



It was a cool spring for the longest time, so it hunkered down in my house for a few weeks and only looked sad outside for a little while. And when the hot weather came, its well-branched habit went gangbusters. The extremely wet summer hasn't impacted it, either. The description says it has resistance to downy mildew, and I don't see a drop of disease anywhere. It also hasn't even thought about flowering, either.

While I am thinking of it, I heard that plants/veggies that pair well together—like basil and tomatoes—also grow well together. I've planted my basil close to my tomatoes this year. Could that also be why my basil is looking awesome? Anyone have insight into this? [EMAIL ME](#).

'BBIG' Webinar Alert!

The Horticultural Research Institute's Boxwood Blight Insight Group (BBIG) is hosting the next in its series of webinars to assist the hort industry in managing boxwood health in nurseries and in the landscape. The "Battling Boxwood Blight" webinar taking place on **August 23 at 1 p.m. Eastern** will feature plant pathologist and nematologist Dr. Jim LaMondia, who will present research results and recent discoveries relating to boxwood blight management. Among the management tactics will be targeted fungicide use, host plant genetics and cultural controls.



You'll want to sign up and learn the latest about this ever-expanding scourge. Register for the webinar [HERE](#).

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

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Senior Editor
Green Profit

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