

Molbak's to close, IGC tours and Merry Good Enough!



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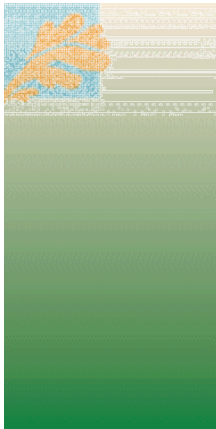
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buzz!

Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

COMING UP THIS WEEK:
Molbak's to Close
JZ & Co. Garden Center Hop
"Not Great, But Not Terrible"
'Tis the Season to Tour
Russell's In Another Movie
Last-Minute Gift Idea

PW
PROVEN
WINNERS

30
SECOND
PLANTER

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TIME?



Molbak's to Close

No one likes to hear about a business closing against the wishes of its owners, but that is exactly what's happening to **Molbak's Garden + Home** in Woodinville, Washington. Long an example of what to do right in the garden center trade, the nearly 70-year-old company is preparing to close in early 2024.



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Back in 2008, the Molbak family sold the 19-acre property on which the business was located to a real estate development group, Green Partners. This developer had assured the Molbak family that their plans were to create a mixed-use development to include shopping, restaurants and residential units with a new Molbak's as an anchor. The whole development, whose working title was the Gardens District, was to have a sustainable design.

According to this [SEATTLE TIMES](#) article, this plan fell apart within the last month as Molbak's accused Green Partners of shutting them out of the development plans. The real estate company, according to the Times report, blamed the plan changes and then the entire shelving of the project on "a combination of factors, including the economic uncertainty brought on by higher interest rates and rising construction costs along with the complexity of creating a large-format garden center in a dense urban development."

Mediation between Molbak's and Green Partners broke down and Molbak's this week made public its intention to close up shop in the first quarter of 2024. "There are no financially viable options that will allow Molbak's to keep operating as the kind of nursery, company and community resource we want to be," Molbak's CEO Julie Kouhia said in a statement. "After considering many different possibilities and a great deal of discussion with the Molbak family, we've determined that we no longer have a path forward."

The family and company as a whole are taking some time to thoughtfully and respectfully bring this locally heralded business to a close. "Our main goal is to close down with integrity and in a way that respects our employees, vendors and customers," Julie said in a press release. "We also want to find a way to celebrate the history, impact and joy of Molbak's."

Read Julie's letter to Molbak's customers and the community [HERE](#).



JZ and Co. Garden Center Hop

My colleague Jen Zurko has some observations from her day-trip to garden centers that she'd like to share with you.

Last Friday, I was invited to tag along with Anna Ball, Susannah Ball, Jeff Gibson and Marvin Miller on their biannual trip to visit garden centers in the Chicagoland area. The foursome usually do a day in the spring and then a day during the holidays to see what's going on at the retail level—what kind of products they're offering, what their consumer customers are buying/saying, how the season is going, etc. I was the lucky stowaway this year.

This year, we visited four IGCs, a Home Depot and a Trader Joe's. A couple of interesting things we noticed:

1. With a little over one week left until Christmas, the IGCs still had a lot of inventory left, in live goods and other holiday décor. Home Depot was the only one that didn't have one live poinsettia

left. They barely had anything left—there were only about six sad-looking Fraser firs and a couple display inflatables left. The only things they had were greens. If you're someone who shops at Home Depot for your holiday décor, it looks like you had to be there right after Halloween.





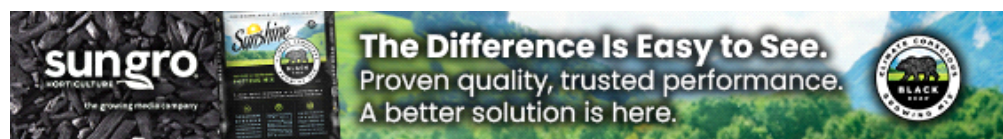
Just to try it out, I bought one of those “DIY Bundles” at the box store we visited. The packaging was convenient and informative. And the result wasn’t too bad, if I do say so myself. I added a few extra pinecones to even it out a bit.

2. Something else we’re seeing more of for the holidays: combination containers. Indoor and outdoor. With poinsettias or with other stuff. “Grab-n-go” or huge planters. Platt Hill Nursery had a ton of different tabletop combos with a wide range of plants and in a wide range of themes.





We also saw lots of combinations with and without poinsettias. Platt Hill Nursery had a very impressive selection.

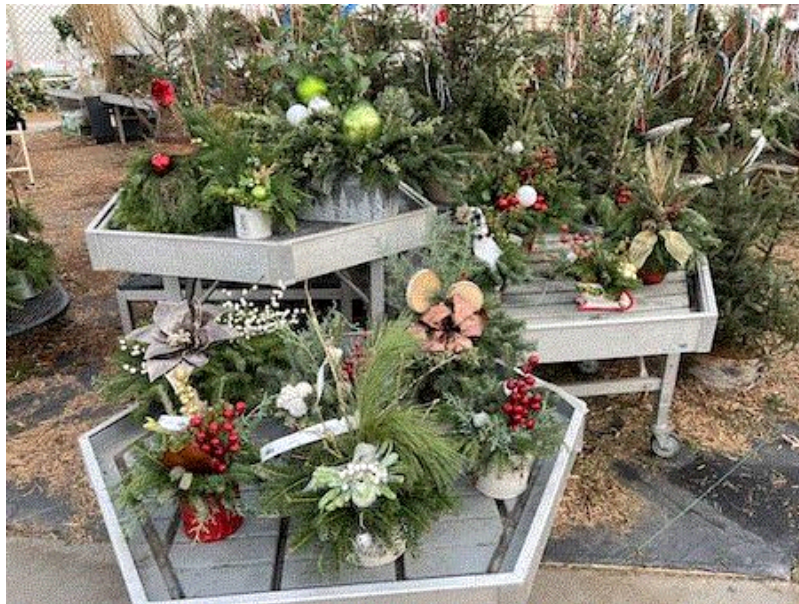


“Not Great, But Not Terrible”

JZ's tour continues.

3. A couple of the retailers said their younger customers do not buy poinsettias—they come in to buy greens and decorations, which is maybe why we saw more combos and options with greens.

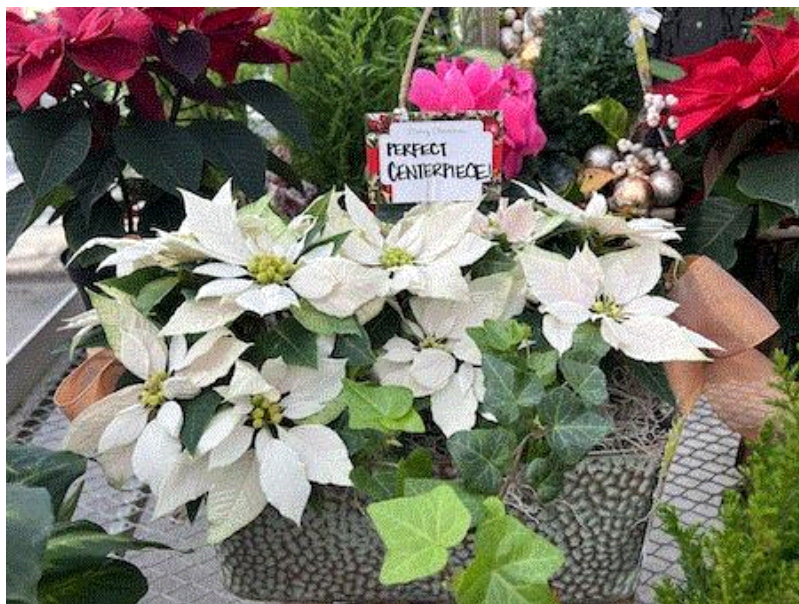




We saw greens containers in all sizes and all price points.

4. Chicago has had a pretty mild winter so far (well, except these last two days, which have been the coldest of the year so far), so people came back multiple times to buy more decorations. For holiday sales, weather can be just as much of a factor as spring. Once it gets too cold, the outdoor decorating stops.

The poinsettia quality we saw was excellent, but the retailers we spoke with said the season has been "just okay." Not great, but not terrible.



Platt Hill Nursery states the obvious for those needing a hostess gift or to add that finishing touch to your holiday décor.



We didn't see any painted poinsettias, but we did see a couple subtly sprinkled with flocking and glitter.



Remember a week or so I saw the trees at the Macy's in downtown Chicago decorated from top to trunk with fake poinsettias? I saw a lot of them as décor for containers at a couple garden centers, too.



Is it me or are gnomes everywhere?! This one is pretty cute, though.



Tom's Garden Market is a true destination. It has a greenhouse, yes, but it also has a bakery, a retail store that sells everything from produce to clothing, and an events space for parties. They host weekends when Santa comes and they say the line to sit on his lap and tell him what you want for Christmas snakes through the store. If you happen to miss him, you can put your letter to him in this mailbox.





Katie Elzer-Peters asks in an article in the upcoming January issue of *Green Profit*, “Is Silver the New White?” I think she’s on to something ...

In the car, Anna commented on how retail in our industry is such a tough business—you have to deal with seasonality in the spring and at Christmastime. I think some of us not in the retail segment may assume that the headaches only happen once a year—it’s all year round!

Thanks for sharing your tour and your insights, JZ!



‘Tis the Season to Tour

My own recent garden center trip was a visit to Mahoney’s Garden Center in Winchester, Massachusetts, the largest of their seven locations. My purpose was both a little socializing and a little shopping, and I was successful with both.

First, the socializing. I met up with senior customer relationship manager Liz Lark-Riley, formerly of Rockledge Gardens in Florida. You may remember Liz as a contributor to *Buzz* during my past two October sabbaticals. Liz is experiencing her first colder-than-Florida winter and her first Christmas season in New England. I don’t have an exact quote from Liz about the holiday up here but the gist of it was basically, “Wow, people are *really* into Christmas.” The real trees, the bundles of greenery and all the holiday trappings are *a big deal*. While Liz was impressed with the numbers of customers and the sales, she said the general feel at the store was that this holiday season was not great but not terrible, as Jen Zurko found during her garden center outing.

During my tour of the store I noted how easy it was to add holiday cheer to an ordinary 365-day department. Simply add in some pinecones, Santa-themed pots and bows.



This wire tree is a subtle way to give some spirit to the tillandsia display.



And I love these mini poinsettias in the terrarium display—and all the products you'd need to make this a DIY project, too.



But best of all were these boxwood and evergreen bough-decorated Christmas trees, created by the floral department. Liz was super impressed by them, as was I.




Thanks, Jenya Tcaci, Mahoney's own in-house photographer, for the photo!

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EPICOR



"Merry Good Enough"

It seems Russell's Garden Center in Wayland, Massachusetts, has been bitten by the film-making bug. You may recall that they recently won an award for their documentary "[Growing Through COVID-19.](#)" And now, their store is featured in the new holiday movie, "Merry Good Enough," a laugh-out-loud comedy.



Russell's is the location where several of the actors go to choose their tree, poinsettia and

wreath. Said store owner Elizabeth Russell Skehan of the film directed by her daughter Genevieve, “Anyone who wants a break from holiday prepping and wants to feel better about realistic expectations for the holidays should watch this movie!” Filmed last December, the film follows the characters and mishaps of a family whose mother disappears for the holidays.

It's available to stream on Amazon Prime, Apple TV and other streaming services. I'm planning on watching it this weekend with family. You should, too!

And congratulations once again, Russell's, for your continued efforts to keep garden centers top of mind in the film industry.

A Nomination Is a Wonderful Gift!

With the new year fast approaching, it's time to get the ball rolling on finding the next Young Retailer Award winner. If you know of a garden center professional who is just knocking it out of the park, nominate that person for the 2024 *Green Profit*/The Garden Center Group Young Retailer Award. This award is our chance—and yours, too— to recognize young (under 35) garden center professionals for their contributions not just to their place of employment but also to the industry at large.

As a reminder about how this all works, we'll choose three finalists, ask each to write guest editorials for the June issue of *Green Profit* and then send them on their way to Cultivate'24, where they'll attend a special dinner with industry luminaries. The winner will be announced at the Unplugged event during the show and will also be the subject of our September issue cover story.

Submitting their names and singing their praises is a wonderful Christmas gift, by the way—and free! Fill out the nomination form [HERE](#). The submission deadline is March 1. We also want to thank The Garden Center Group and AmericanHort for sponsoring this year's award!

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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