

The word on Molbak's, plus let's talk shrink and winter shows



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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Green Thumb's People's
Choice
The Last Three
New Veg Gardening Books
Let's Talk Shrink
Get Ready for Winter Shows

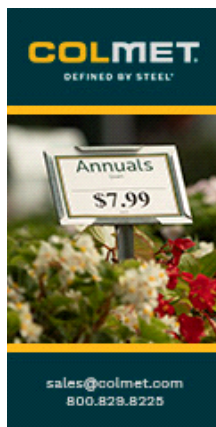
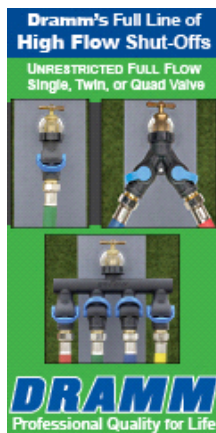


The Word on Molbak's

I informed you last that Molbak's Garden + Home in Woodinville, Washington, was making plans to close. You can read the details about the reason for the closing in that [issue of buzz](#). In short, the closure is due to the collapse of a redevelopment initiative that would have made the 67-year-old garden center the centerpiece of a "city in a garden" project.

"The project was our plan for the future and our opportunity to remain in Woodinville for many years to come," said Molbak's CEO Julie Kouhia. "To be forced out of our long-time home and not be able to realize that vision is devastating. It is heartbreaking for our employees and their families, our loyal customers and vendors, and many others throughout the Northwest who love Molbak's."

Molbak's initially planned to close down in December 2023. With an outpouring of the community and loyal customers, the decision to close has been pushed back to January 28. A going-out-of-



business sale begins today, Friday, January 5, and continues while supplies last. “Our goal over the next few weeks is to close down with integrity and in a manner that honors our employees, vendors and customers. We also want to find a way to celebrate the history, impact and joy of Molbak’s along the way,” said Julie.

My friend and *buZZ* contributor Richard Criley wrote to me after the announcement of Molbak’s closing with fond memories, and specifically called out their houseplant department as exceptional (high praise from a Hawaiian!). If you’d like to share your memories of Molbak’s here, please do! Send me an email about them to ewells@ballpublishing.com.



How Were Your Holiday Sales?

I asked that question in the very last *buZZ* newsletter of 2023. Just two folks responded to my query. One took the time to pen some hate speech at various groups—I won’t include that here but suggest that that person find more kindness in his heart this year. You get what you give, after all. That’s a motto we can all take into 2024 with us.

The second response came from Elizabeth Russell-Skehan of Russell’s Garden Center in Wayland, Massachusetts—the very same person who has been sharing news of various cinematic endeavors and accomplishments over the last few years. The good news kept rolling for Russell’s.

“We had one of the busiest seasons ever from Thanksgiving until Christmas. I kept waiting for the lull so I could catch up on spring buying, but alas it never happened. It definitely felt long and super busy (except the one rainy day) right up until about 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve. We’re all ready for a new season!”

You know what this reminds me of? Exercise. When you’re stuck in a chair or car or are just stationary for a long while, the day couldn’t go slower and you’re not really motivated to much of anything else. But add in some movement of some sort and suddenly you have more energy and more focus to tackle whatever comes next. Russell’s got some good exercise during the holiday season! And now they are ready and motivated for moving on. It also reminds me of that saying from *Suga Free*, “If you stay ready, you don’t gotta get ready.” Very true. What saying, motto or word are you using as your touchstone for 2024 (for business or personal)? For me, it’s “align.”

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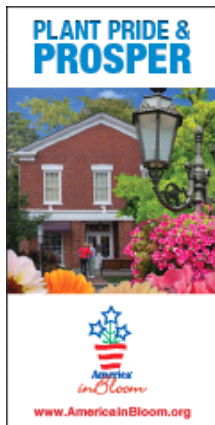
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To Market

The Christmas sales season is one of those affairs that heavily favors those in the “stay ready, don’t gotta get ready” camp. To that end, the January markets are about to begin, and you’ll find plenty of folks at the markets offering Christmas 2024 items for pre-booking now. Such as the folks at Regency International.

Holiday 2024 Pre-Order Begins NOW!



REGENCY INTERNATIONAL

Regency International will be at the Dallas Market January 10-16 (WTC 407) and in Atlanta January 16-22 (Building 1, Suite 17-A3). Make it super-easy on yourself by setting up your Dallas showroom appointment [HERE](#), or if you’re headed to Atlanta, reserve your showroom time [HERE](#).

Not travelling due to child care/weather/dogs won’t let you leave/other business? You can do all your pre-booking orders online! Don’t you love how modern technology can make some aspects of your business so simple? Head onto Regency’s [ONLINE ORDERING](#) to find all you need for Holiday 2024 while it’s still fresh in your mind.

For a sneak peek at holiday items as well as non-seasonal gifts and accessories you may be seeing at the January markets, colleague Jen Polanz enlisted the help of the folks at Andmore for a preview in the January issue of [Green Profit](#).

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

PW PROVEN WINNERS Perennials



Walters Gardens

Green Thumb’s People’s Choice

As promised, I’m back this week with the People’s Choice Green Thumb Award Winners for 2024. These awards, conducted by the [National Garden Bureau](#) and voted on the 10,000 gardeners, are based on four criteria: uniqueness, technological innovation, ability to solve a

garden problem or present an opportunity, and its appeal to gardeners. In other words, the following five plants and one product are chosen by gardeners because they are new, innovative and can help them—your customers—in their gardening endeavors.

Without further ado, here are the People's Choice Green Thumb Award Winners for 2024.

Shrub: **Better Boxwood Skylight** from Concept Plants and Plant Development Services. As you may know, the Better Boxwood line is the first collection of boxwood bred for blight resistance. Skylight is one of four varieties within the collection, and is the item that is faster growing with medium green leaves. Use it for balls, mass plantings or as medium hedges. Hardy to Zone 5.



Perennial: **Agapanthus Blackjack**, another Concept Plants/Plant Development Services variety. You may remember this as the RHS 2023 Plant of the Year. It offers great performance, a compact and semi-dwarf habit and flower clusters in a unique, near-black color. Ideal for Zones 8-11.



Annual: **Petunia AMAZONAS Plum Cockatoo** from Danziger. This new variety from Danziger brings the tropics to porches and yards everywhere (how fitting, since **Tropic Like It's Hot** is a Pinterest Predicts trend for 2024). Green hues pair with tropical purples on large blooms that appear on 12-18 in. mounded plants. And it pairs well with foliage plants, broadening the opportunities for a backyard tropical flair.



The Last Three

Edible: **Cucumber Quick Snack** from PanAmerican Seed's Kitchen Minis Collection. It's a crisp, sweet cucumber you can eat straight off the plant! It produces handfuls of small, cocktail-sized cukes over the course of a few weeks. Great for containers, and it doesn't require pollinators. Also a winner in the Professional's Choice category, so this is totally a variety to keep your eye on!



Houseplant: **Echeveria Coral Reef Red** from Green Fuse Botanicals. Strongly pronounced ruffly red foliage whether indoors or out! And it produces bell-shaped flowers most of the year, too. Another dual winner in both People's and Professional's Choice.



Garden Product: **Sunshine Black Bear Potting Mix** from SunGro Horticulture. Black Bear is pure carbon captured and stored as a growing media aggregate. It's produced by the pyrolysis of

wood that would otherwise be burned or sent to a landfill. It has great drainage and aeration for both indoor and outdoor plants.



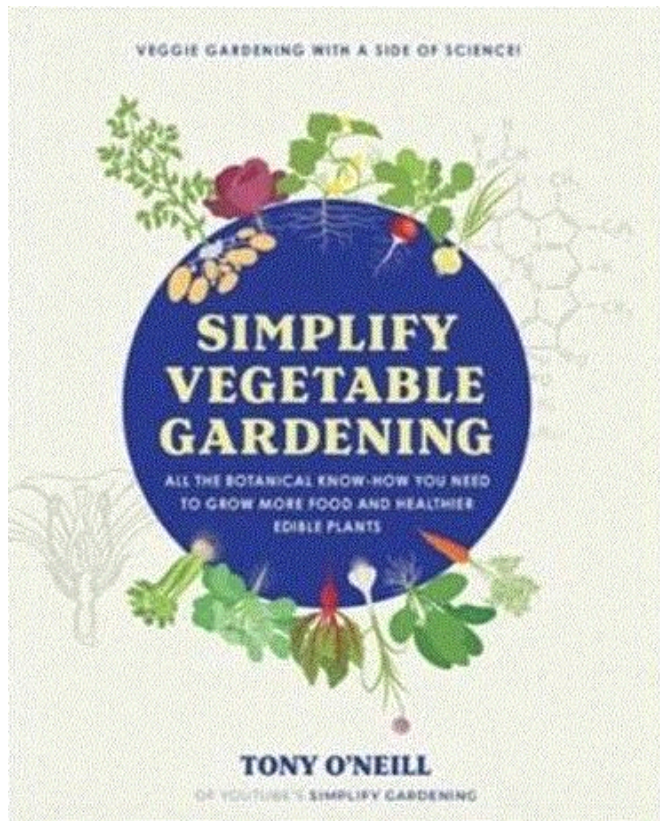
Are you as surprised as I am that a People's Choice Award is presented to such a practical and sustainable product? That's a good takeaway for your store's buyer as we stock our shelves for 2024 and beyond.



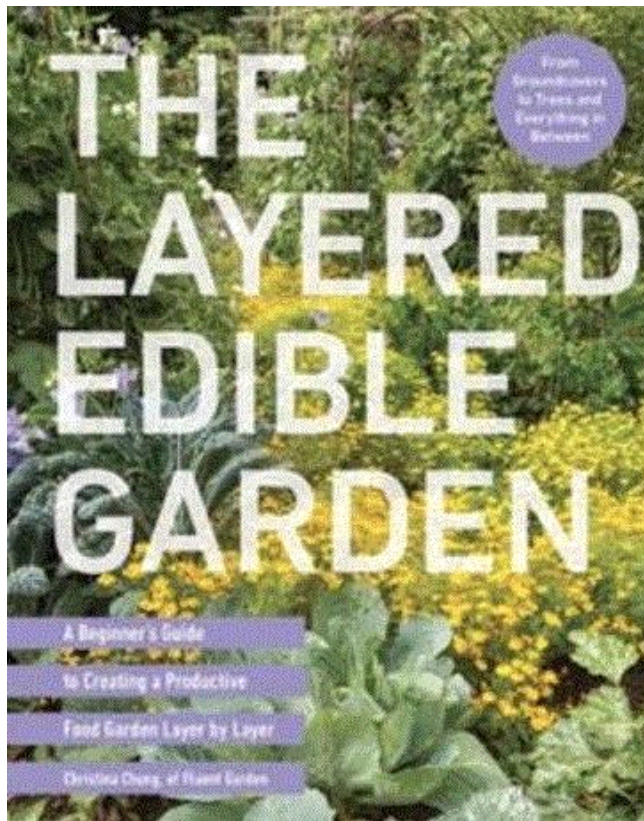
Two New Veg Gardening Books

Books about vegetable gardening would get my vote for a gardening product award. Cool Springs Press has two new titles on the subject coming out in February.

The first is "Simplify Vegetable Gardening" by [YouTuber Tony O'Neill](#). For folks who are a step or two beyond beginning gardening and want to up the ante a bit, Tony will help you understand the natural science behind enhancing plant health—and will then help you implement it. You are professionals, so you know this stuff. Your customers, however, might not understand how to foster beneficial soil microbes, or boost production via a plant's natural functions and so forth. Essentially, Tony is blending botany, biology and earth science to help folks produce food.



The second book is "The Layered Vegetable Garden" from Christina Chung, a.k.a. [@fluent.garden](#). Interplanted polycultures is what Christina means by layering. In the book, she follows nature's lead by growing plants in mixed communities. Think "food forest" where crops from eight different layers (trees, sub-canopy, shrubs, vines, perennials, annuals, groundcovers and edible roots) grow together, block out weeds, protect each other from pests and give each other nutritional and structural support. From the page previews, I think she even includes some recipes.



As I said, both books are available in February. Contact your Quarto/Cool Springs Press rep for details and orders.



Let's Talk Shrink

I don't often talk about operational issues here. But I should! I was inspired by a transcript of an interview I read about the art and science of retail shrink, with the interviewees being advisors in the McKinsey management firm. It's a long piece but well worth your time (read it [HERE](#)).

Two points that jump out at me are basics, but it's good to be reminded of the basics:

1. What is "shrink?" The advisors say this can only be defined by the company. Is it "known loss," e.g. plants that died or pottery that shattered? Or is it "unknown loss," e.g. something got legs and walked away? Is it both? It comes down to what is of value for your store. And once you know what your shrinkable items are, you can set about measuring and remedying.
2. The second is one advisor's answer to this question: "What advice would you give to a CEO

who asks you, 'What is the single most important thing my company should do right now to reduce shrink?'" Bill Mutell's answer is this:

"I would ask them the following question: 'What is the customer experience and customer value proposition that you are trying to consistently deploy in all of your retail environments?'"

I like that answer. For instance, if you are trying to stop theft and put up gates, install barbed wire or add security staff, how does that change the customer experience your customers value? Will it put off your customers and thereby lower potential sales?

I'm trying for the life of me to think of an on-paper shrink example to accompany the theft example I just gave, but I'm only on my first cup of coffee today. Maybe you have an example (I know you are reading this, Sid). **SEND ME** your example if you have one, and we'll continue the conversation next week.

Get Ready for the Winter Shows

The winter trade show season has begun! I have a few a few announcements and reminders:

1. **MANTS** is happening next week, January 10-12 in Baltimore, Maryland. It's a huge order-writing show. Its popularity has really exploded in the last half-dozen years or so, despite the pandemic, and it has reliably taken on more vendors who check all the boxes for garden center buyers. There's an outside chance I will be attending on the 11th, so if you see me wandering the aisles, be sure to say hello. Find exhibitors in advance [HERE](#).
2. The last day for TPIE early bird registration is TODAY, with today being Friday, January 5. You can save \$10, and if you are bringing a crew, that \$10 can add up to enough to cover an Uber ride from the airport. Save where and when you can. Register for TPIE [HERE](#). The show happens January 17-19 in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. I am definitely attending that one!
3. Wintergreen, presented by the Georgia Green Industry Association and the University of Georgia Extension, is more conference than trade show. They are taking their education offerings on the road again this year, heading to the lovely city of Savannah. For just \$99 you'll hear from top Georgia hort specialists such as JC Chong of SePRO (and our amazing *PestTalks* newsletter), Jean Woodward and Ping Yu of the University of Georgia and Daryl Johnson of Bioline AgroSciences. Wintergreen On the Road takes place January 19 at the [Coastal Georgia Botanical Gardens](#). Find out more and register [HERE](#).



Have any show or event you want to see here? [TELL ME](#) about it.

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



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