

Costa Expands; Houseplants Galore; Shows and Smarts



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# GrowerTalks' Acres Online

News and Commentary from GrowerTalks Magazine

## COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Costa acquires Battlefield  
- Regarding Costa's 2022 season  
Houseplant Appreciation Day  
Speaking of houseplants ...  
Poinsettia season survey?  
January events to attend  
Perennial PGR Guide  
Free Peat webinar Jan. 11  
Educational opportunities

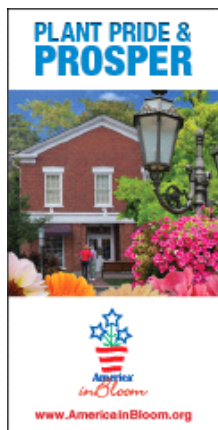
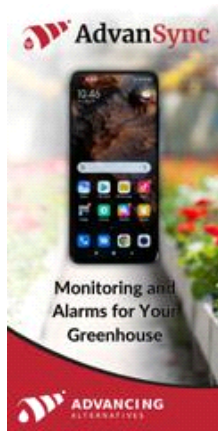
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## Costa acquires Virginia's Battlefield Farms

In the first big horticulture deal of the new year, **Costa Farms** of Miami, Florida, has announced the purchase of **Battlefield Farms** of Rapidan, Virginia. Battlefield is owned by the van Hoven family and run by Bobby and Anthony van Hoven, two of the sons of Jerry van Hoven, who purchased the business in 1990. Bobby and Anthony and the rest of the leadership team will stay on and run the business for Costa.

I spoke with Jose "Joche" Smith, CEO of Costa Farms, about the deal.



Joche told me he's had a relationship with Bobby for some years, and they've talked about doing a deal at various times, but the timing wasn't right. In 2022, Battlefield was in a good position to for a partnership. However, 2022 was not a good time for Costa (in fact, Joche says it was "the worst year in the company's history"—more on that below). So no deal was done.

But about six months ago, the timing was right for both companies, they got down to brass tacks and worked out a deal. Joche says the van Hovens are "very like-minded, with a similar culture ... I think they're very good, authentic people, and we were anxious to get something done ... We are thrilled with these guys—the team, the facilities, the customers ... we're just super happy with it."

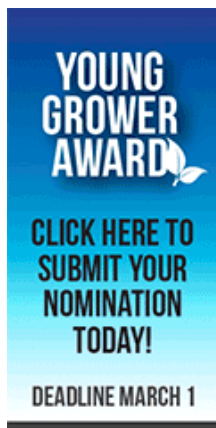


Why Virginia? Territory expansion ... but not too far from home. Ashville, North Carolina, is the farthest north they currently have a facility; Rapidan is just six hours further north, which he likes because it allows their regional operating units to help each other out.

It's too soon to talk integration of the company into the Costa fold. But one thing Battlefield adds to the line is bulbs—lilies, amaryllis and so on, both finished and for other growers.

I asked Joche why Costa did the deal in the first place? Was Battlefield simply opportunistic? Or is it part of an overall growth strategy for Costa?

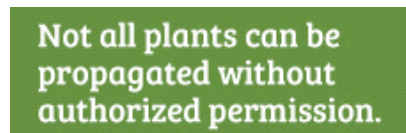




"I think it was a great opportunity," he says. "At the same time, we're absolutely continuing to grow this way. From 2010 to 2020, about half of our growth came from acquisition. Then there was more organic growth for two or three years. As that has slowed down, and with our commitment to continue to grow, we feel like a lot of it will have to happen this way, through acquisition."

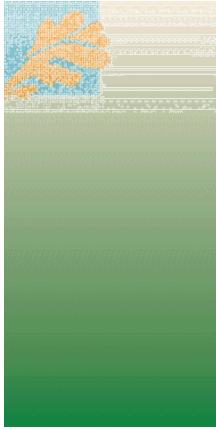
"Are we open to it? For sure. We've had other people approach us, we'll talk, and with the right fit, with the right partners, yeah, absolutely."

Costa's most recent acquisitions before this one? Deleon's Bromeliads in 2020. Before that, Homestead's Green Leaf Nursery in 2018, Delray Plants in 2017 and Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses in 2014.



## Regarding what Joche said about 2022 ...

We all know that Spring 2022 was tough for many, especially big-box growers, some of whom were asked to reduce or stop shipments sometime around Mother's Day due to poor weather and excess inventory. But that isn't the reason Joche says 2022 was the worst year ever for the company. No, it was indoor foliage. And it wasn't due to spring weather, it was due to high inventory levels at the retailers they serve—inventory levels of everything—bicycles, box springs,



bath soap, because of the whole COVID supply chain fiasco.

Joche says they were asked by their retail partners to grow more indoor plants—a lot more—because in 2020 and 2021 nobody could get enough. So like any good vendor, they said sure! But due to those high inventory levels, the mandate came down from on high that every category, every department, needed to cut back hard on open purchase orders. Unfortunately, that included livegoods, and Costa was told to cut way back on future shipments. Not because plants weren't selling, but simply because stores were overstocked across the board.

"We threw away tens of millions of dollars' worth of product. It was the only year in the company's history that we lost money. It was a very, very difficult year for us."



Costa HQ in Homestead.

What did they learn?

"We took some big risks in 2022 that we would not take again ... We're for sure a much better organization for it, and a leaner organization for it. We're better at planning, better at execution, better at reacting. All those things are good, but man, it was a super, super expensive lesson."



**Houseplant Appreciation Day is January 10!**

Don't forget to take advantage of Houseplant Appreciation Day, which is coming up Wednesday, January 10. But there's no reason you can't stretch your celebration (or sale) into the weekend.

What is Houseplant Appreciation Day? Well, it was founded by Bob Matthews of Gardeners Network ([www.gardenersnet.com](http://www.gardenersnet.com)), who says this on his website:

*By the 10th of January, the holidays are a distant, happy memory. We have put the decorations away. Now, our houses all look kinda plain and drab inside. As you look around the house, something catches your eye. It's over there, in the corner of the room. It's still green, but it sure looks dry. And it's drooping a bit. Why, it's a houseplant! Funny, but with all the holiday hullabaloo, you've all but forgotten your plants.*

*Well, aren't your houseplants lucky that the tenth of January has arrived!? Today is THE day to get back to tending to and loving each and every plant in your home. It's also a day to appreciate just how special and important houseplants are to you. As gardeners, we need to have our hands in some dirt. Caring for them gives us that opportunity. After all, it's a long way to spring, when we can get out into the garden again.*

So true, Bob! Your existing houseplants could probably use some love, and maybe a fresh companion to keep them company.

So, while Houseplant Appreciation Day may not have the Congressional Seal of Approval, it's still a good excuse to sell more plants, buy more plants or simply show some love to the ones you already have.

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## Speaking of houseplants ...

I mentioned last time that I've relocated to Central Florida—eastern Orlando, to be precise—and boy is it a treat to go into a garden center in January and see it full of annuals, veggies and tropical plants! As avid gardeners, Laurie and I moved back here specifically because we were tired of putting our hobby away for seven months of the year. Now we can plant any day we care to!

We grew up down here and got all our horticultural training and experience here, so we know the marketplace. Still, after being away for 30 years, it was somewhat shocking to find poinsettias out among the tropicals at one of our local big-box stores.





But of course they can be used in the landscape here, and often are, such as in this planter I spotted at a major Orlando intersection.





### **Tell me about your poinsettia season**

I was having a post-holiday discussion with one of my colleagues, a delightful fellow but one who is overly prone to worrying about our industry. I always feel like I'm talking him off the ledge. Right now he's worried about the poinsettia market. Apparently, based on just a few conversations he's had with growers, retailers and folks in the know, the poinsettia season was not stellar and growers may be talking about cutting back for 2024. He asked if I'd heard anything, and I realized I hadn't. So I thought, "Hmmm, is there a way to do a 'Poinsettia Season



Sales Report' sort of like I do for spring?"

I don't know, but I do know I can ask you now, after the fact: How was your poinsettia season on a scale of 1 to 10? 10 meaning record sales, sold out, made money, love the things! And 1 meaning you'd have been better off stuffing the cash you spent growing the things into your greenhouse boiler.

Send me a score and some notes [HERE](#). Be sure to include your state(s) or province(s). And also offer up some commentary, good, bad or indifferent, in explanation of your score, including your customer base, pot sizes, etc.

And please participate, even if you've never done one of my surveys before. The more, the merrier!

Who knows, maybe it'll become an annual survey.



## January events to attend

Did you know that January has more horticulture shows than any other month? Thirty-five shows are listed in January at our official horticultural event calendar, [Hortcalendar.com](http://Hortcalendar.com). February has 19 events, March has 22—not bad, but January has them beat!

What shows will you be attending? Big ones include [MANTS](#), [TPIE](#), [Gulf States](#), [IPM Essen](#) and the [Atlanta Market](#). Ball Publishing will have editors and sales reps at all of those; we'd do more, but there's only so many days in the month in which we can do laundry between trips!

Personally, I'll once again do two of my favorite back-to-back shows, TPIE and IPM. TPIE—the Tropical Plant International Expo—is back in Ft. Lauderdale after three years across the state in Tampa, a move necessitated by the renovation of the Broward County Convention Center. Tampa was a great host, but it'll be good to be back "home" among the megayachts and exotic cars of the seasonal residents. And this time I'm driving down, not flying. Heck, I could even take the [train](#) from Orlando!

There are 30 more places you can go in January; check them all out at [Hortcalendar.com](http://Hortcalendar.com).



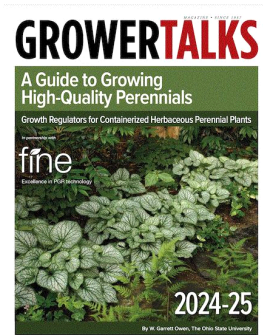
## New PGR guide available

When it comes to grower guides, Ball Publishing writes the book—quite literally! We have five currently in publication, both in print and as downloadable PDF files. They include:

- 2024-25 PERENNIALS PGR GUIDE
- 2023-24 ANNUALS PGR GUIDE
- 2024 INSECTICIDE, MITICIDE & FUNGICIDE GUIDE—ENGLISH
- 2024 INSECTICIDE, MITICIDE & FUNGICIDE GUIDE—SPANISH
- 2023 BIOSOLUTIONS GUIDE

As you can tell from the fresh dates, each of these is updated regularly and packed with the latest management information and products.

The latest is our Perennials PGR Guide, absolutely hot off the presses for 2024. You'll get it in the mail with your copy of *GrowerTalks*; otherwise, stop by the FINE booth at your favorite trade show and see if they've got a copy for you. But all are also available online as PDFs, which you can bookmark for quick reference.



## Free GrowerTalks webinar on peat January 11

If you buy, use or sell peat and peat products, you should attend this important webinar titled **“Responsible Use of Peat: Resource Management for Future Generations.”** It will help you understand the peat market, the controversy surround peat harvesting and its impact (or lack thereof) on the market, and arm you to answer customer questions about the sustainability of peat.



My guest expert will be Pierre-Olivier Jean, Natural Resource Manager for Premier Tech's



Growers and Consumers business group. Pierre-Olivier comes from a background in terrestrial ecology research, and for the past eight years, he's been coordinating with the environmental certification organization Veriflora on a Responsibly Managed Peatlands certification. He also helped plan the restoration of hundreds of wetland acres across Canada and the United States, so he definitely knows his stuff when it comes to peat!

Tune in **Thursday, January 11**, at 1 p.m. Eastern/Noon Central to gain valuable knowledge about the peat industry's efforts to preserve this essential horticultural resource.

Sign up at [www.growertalks.com/webinars](http://www.growertalks.com/webinars).

## More educational opportunities

Before things get really busy heading into spring, why not attend a few more webinars to expand your mind? Our national industry association, [AmericanHort](#), has a lineup available over the coming weeks that, as they say, "highlights best practices and explores innovative business solutions, so you can grow faster, perform better, and prepare for the future." Who doesn't want to do that? Some are member-only, some are free to members and have a small cost for non-members, and some are open to all. Sessions include:

### **Building Your Professional Brand**

January 24, 12:30-1:30 p.m. EST

In a world where first impressions are everything, your professional brand is your passport to success. In this one-hour workshop, we'll delve into the art of branding, helping you gain a 360-degree view of your personal reputation, skills, and values to present yourself professionally in a more authentic and compelling way. Presented by Becky Paxton, Account Executive, Garden Media Group and moderated by Generation Next Community Connector Melinda Knuth. Sponsored by BASF.

Free for AmericanHort members and \$49 for non-members.

<https://www.americanhort.org/event/grow-foward-building-your-professional-brand#events>

### **AI for Horticulture Businesses**

January 30, 2:00-3:30 p.m. EST

Our first Industry Insider webinar of 2024 shows you how generative AI can optimize workflows, ignite innovation, and significantly increase productivity. This hands-on session explains the fundamentals of this technology's capabilities and why it can be a game-changer in the workplace. You will learn the realistic capabilities of Generative AI and hear common concerns and cautions surrounding this emergent tech. Our three subject matter experts will lead breakout rooms to discuss how they use this forefront technology in sales, marketing, customer service, safety, and security.

Free for AmericanHort members and \$49 for non-members.

<https://www.americanhort.org/event/industry-insider-ai-for-horticulture-businesses>

### **Eliminating Your Estate Tax: How to Secure Major Advantages Right Now**

February 6, 1:00-2:00 p.m. EST

If you want to pass on more of your estate to heirs without paying estate taxes, the current legislation, which is set to expire at the end of 2025, is currently in your favor. Tax experts from AmericanHort Affinity Partner Pinion, including Brian Kuehl, will explain why estate planning is crucial, even if you have already drafted a plan.

AmericanHort members-only webinar. The recording will be available to members.

<https://www.americanhort.org/event/eliminating-your-estate-tax-how-to-secure-major-advantages-right-now>

### **Using AI in Your Business**

February 13, 20, 27, 1:00-2:30 p.m. EST

Artificial intelligence (AI) can play a multifaceted role in your operations, and this three-session Mastery Series teaches you how. Our speakers go in-depth on AI-powered strategies you can use across your operation, from marketing and content creation to sales and training to security and safety.

Classes are \$99 per class for members and \$149 per class for nonmembers. You must register for each class individually.

<https://www.americanhort.org/education/mastery-series>

### **Women in Horticulture: Interview with Arianna Cabrera de Ona**

February 21, 3:00-4:00 p.m. EST

Arianna Cabrera de Oña is the Senior Vice President, General Counsel, and Chief People Officer for Costa Farms. Join us to hear Arianna's perspectives on industry dynamics, the art of cultivating company culture and the principles of servant leadership. This is an opportunity to glean wisdom from a seasoned legal and human resources professional who has made significant contributions to the green industry.

Free for all who attend the live event. The recording will be available to AmericanHort members.

<https://www.americanhort.org/event/women-in-horticulture-interview-series-february-2024>

## **Time zone fun**

I'm back to living in the Eastern Time Zone, which is not good for an old guy who could barely stay awake for the ten o'clock news in Chicago. But as an early riser, now I'm even earlier than usual than my Central Time Zone colleagues.

I mentioned this to fellow Eastern Standard Time dweller Ellen Wells (Boston), and she provided me some interesting **Time Zone Trivia**: Wrote Ellen, "Did you know that 30-minute and 45-minute time zones exist? As close as Newfoundland! Now THAT would really throw me off."

Me, too! But it's true—some time zones are X number of hours plus an addition 30 or 45 minutes ahead of or behind Greenwich Mean Time (aka UTC, or Coordinated Universal Time). India is UTC +5:30, parts of Australia are UTC + 9:30 or + 8:45. Newfoundland in Canada is UTC-3:30, Nepal is UTC +5:45. There are others, often islands, where nobody wears a watch so it doesn't matter because it's five o'clock somewhere. Or beer-30.

## **Finally ...**

More Florida horticulture for you:

I'm used to buying my landscape plants by the 1-, 3- or 5-gal. pot and bringing it home myself in the back of my pickup. This is the first time I can recall having a plant purchase delivered on a flatbed trailer! We added a dozen of these pretty sabal palms to our landscape at the bargain



price of \$275 each, in the ground.



Of course, digging and planting with four men and a skidsteer is just plain cheating! Still, you can't beat the instant gratification and curb appeal they provide.





A few hundred (thousand?) more assorted palms, trees and shrubs and our yard will start to look like the tropical paradise we are hoping for!

Feel free to email me at [beytes@growertalks.com](mailto:beytes@growertalks.com) if you have ideas, comments or questions.

Happy New Year!

**Chris Beytes**  
Editor-in-Chief  
*GrowerTalks* and *Green Profit*

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