What's happening in Southern IGCs, plus just walk out



THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 2024

subscribe









Green Profit's buZZ

Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

What Early Spring Looks Like
Speaking of Spring
AR with Bloomin' Easy
Just … Walk Out?
Social Media Trends
Meadows
HRI
Green Industry Survey



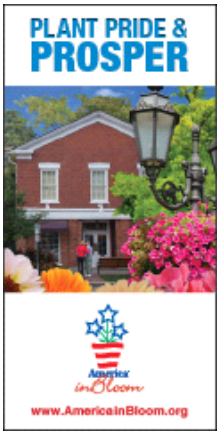
What Does Early Spring Look Like?

Now that it's actually and officially spring, asking how your season is going isn't too much of a stretch. I've had steady responses about spring and its progress from two folks—Judy Mitchell in North Carolina and Debby Pings in the Houston, Texas area. Judy reports, "Spring has sprung! We have had great weather lately. Customers are looking for tomatoes, peppers and marigolds. Of course, it is too early for those. Monday has 30F predicted. Average last frost date here is April 15—still a month away—and we often have frost until May 1. 78F today!"

Debby's weekly reports are interesting because she writes them as a transplanted Midwesterner living in the completely different environment of Texas. She says in the North, "there is a 'down time' when a gardener can dream and plan for the next gardening year. Here the down time is from June—August (give or take) and the plants that can shine during those brutal months are the most sought after." Maybe we Northerners give more to plants that sparkle with foliage or







berries during our winter down time?

Debby also reports that Texas natives are “very big right now, hummingbird/butterfly gardening is followed closely by pollinator-friendly gardens. Not as many first-time vegetable gardeners, but many people who caught the bug are trying new things.” As for classes offered by the garden center, the most popular have been on organic gardening and soil preparation. What’s not selling, interestingly, are “unique houseplant supplies.”

Now, you are quite welcome to write in with how your spring is going so far. Or, maybe you have only enough time to snap a pic of your bestest early spring display—something that you think will greet your customers with all the fanfare of Opening Day at the ball field. I love photos! Take a photo and email it to me at ewells@ballpublishing.com. Just tell me where you’re sending it from.



Speaking of Spring

The Bobbleheads are bobbling up the California coast for the 2024 version of California Spring Trials. The first two issues of their daily *Acres of Buzz* daily recaps have already dropped, complete with links to video highlights. So far the items that have jumped out to me are:

From Day 1, the reorganization of PanAmerican Seed’s Hand Picked veggie program. Colleague Bill Calkins wrote in *Acres of Buzz* that “with all of the new breeding coming out of [PanAmerican’s] Hand Picked program, it was time to reorganize things a bit to help growers select the best varieties for different uses. Now you can find four categories: Kitchen Minis (for indoor, window sill growing); Groundbreakers (best for in-ground use); Basket Bites (yes, for hanging baskets); and Patio Picks (ideal for pots and containers).” That just makes sense! And all these varieties are neatly recategorized in their **NEW CATALOG**.



Maybe you could do some grouping of categories for veggie starts on your own garden center

benches this spring and help make it easy for your customers.

From Day 2, I really liked the new Stratus Blue Picotee lobelia from Westhoff. Why? Because it's pretty. And I'm not sure I have ever seen a picotee lobelia.

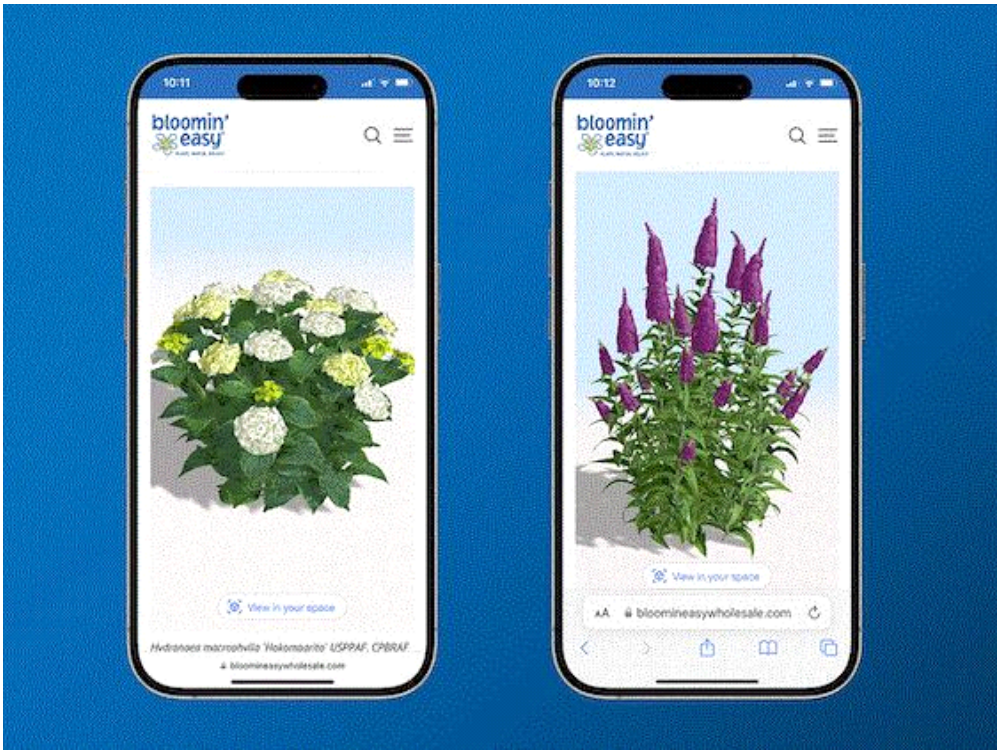


That'll make a lovely component in a combo, don't you agree? But again, who am I kidding, I liked a whole bunch of the new varieties they covered in their Day 2 edition. You can catch up on *Acres of Buzz* HERE or catch their videos HERE.



Going AR with Bloomin' Easy

This week's CAST reminds us that plant breeders and branders are ever trying to innovate. Like the Bloomin' Easy brand, for instance. Something new that they are introducing this spring is giving consumers the ability to use Augmented Reality (AR) from their mobile device when deciding which of Bloomin' Easy's Top 10 varieties suit their spaces the best.

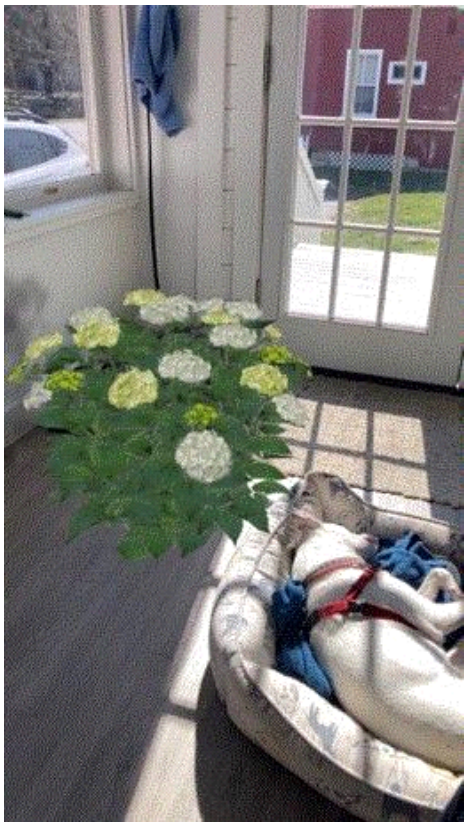


“As a younger brand, it’s important that we continue to differentiate and offer the market unique, premium value,” said the brand’s Consumer Marketing Manager, Madison House. “Young homeowners are already using augmented reality through retail experiences from Ikea and Nike—why not give them a fun try-before-you-buy experience with buddleias and hydrangeas?”

How’d they get this AR going? They partnered with the designers and developers at a company called Home Outside, founded by famed landscape designer Julie Moir Messervy. Home Outside uses the latest technology to make landscape design accessible to anyone wanting to create a simple garden layout. Bloomin’ Easy worked with Home Outside because they found value in the company’s ability to bring something that once seemed so out of reach well within the realm of possibilities for young homeowners.

As I mentioned, this AR technology is available for Bloomin’ Easy’s Top 10 varieties, which includes items such as Cherry-Go-Round reblooming hydrangea (a Retailers’ Choice Award winner from Cultivate’23!) and Grin and Tonic reblooming hydrangea (what a great name).

Want to see how it works? If you’re reading this *buZZ!* on your phone, just click HERE and click on “view in your space”. Otherwise, click HERE, copy the URL to your phone’s web browser and go from there. Here’s what Grin and Tonic looks like next to my sleeping Sammie in my mudroom.



Neat, huh? I can totally see this being used for designing a patioscape or small garden. Bloomin' Easy hopes to have more varieties available via AR next spring.



Just … Walk Out?

In our effort to bring you even more on new technologies for the retail environment, colleague Jen Polanz brings you her experience with walking out and not paying. You'll see what I mean.

I recently flew through Midway (MDW) in Chicago on my way to Las Vegas, and encountered a new style of retail that I had previously only read about: the automated checkout-style store, technology courtesy of Amazon. I passed the Hudson store at first, and decided to come back around and give it a try.

The concept is pretty simple: scan your credit card on the way in, walk through the green panels, pick whatever you want off the shelf and just, well, walk out through the red exit panels. No checkout, no people, no nothing. Just … walk out.





Now, there was a woman standing just outside the store to troubleshoot, so I asked her where I could get a receipt (most business travelers are trained to get a receipt). She directed me to the justwalkout.com website, where, within a few clicks you can have your receipt (there's also more information about the technology there).

For me the process worked flawlessly as I walked out with my bottled water and package of

nuts. Still, it seems like a store of this nature would always have to have at least one person present to answer questions and troubleshoot (it seems like the card-scanning portion could be the most troublesome spot). Perhaps that's less labor, though, than a typical Hudson airport shop? And, it certainly reduces the possibility of shoplifting, as you can't enter without scanning the card.

This could be a potential solution for high-traffic areas that have a small, contained footprint where the entrance and exit could be controlled.

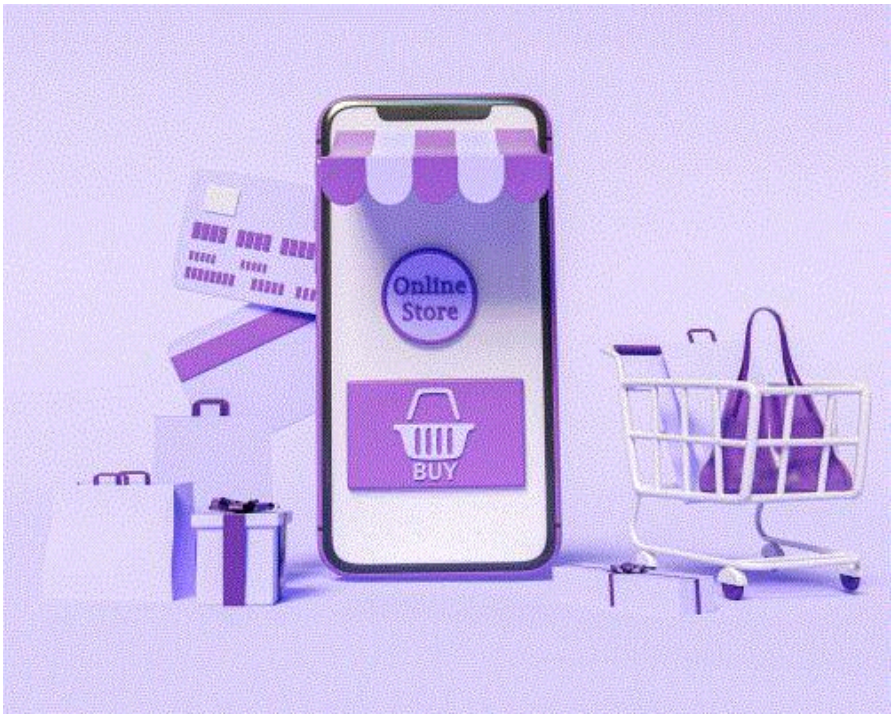
Thanks, JP!

Social Media Trends for 2024

When I think of younger generations, as Bloomin' Easy has, I think of social media and how to best reach people of all ages. The folks at Hubspot, a developer and marketer of marketing and customer service software products, have also been thinking about social media—specifically the 11 social media trends marketing folks like yourself should be aware of for the upcoming spring sales season and beyond (yes, if you sell something, then you are a marketer). Here are three of those social media trends for 2024:

Brands with engaged social media communities will win this year. Content is only half the battle. Creating community is the other half. Connect and engage with your audience in a meaningful way. The author of this piece has ways for you to know if you have an engaged community—definitely worth the read for you or your social media person on staff.

Social media is the future of e-commerce. More than one in five Gen Z, Millennial and Gen X users bought a product from a company social media page within the last three months. Plus, social media is the preferred way to discover new products. However, some folks are still wary of purchasing a product from a brand through a social media app and will purchase it elsewhere. They say Instagram offers the best shopping experience.



Short-form video is the highest ROI format and will see the most growth of any trend in 2024. I mentioned Leah Palmer's success with YouTube Shorts for Star Roses and Plants—she

seems to be onto something here! Hubspot's analysts find that 57% of Gen Z and 42% of Millennials prefer to learn about products through short-form videos on Tik Tok, Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. 83% of marketers who use it say it's the most effective format they use.

Whew, and that's just three of the 11 trends! If there's anything you should take 10 minutes to read and digest fully this week, it's THIS INFO from Hubspot.

Meadows and HRI Make Scholarships Easier

Students, look up from whatever March Madness game you're watching for a moment and learn about something that is a surer bet than Iowa being in the Finals. Applying for multiple scholarships at a time just became your bracket buster. The Sidney B. Meadows Scholarship Endowment Fund and the Horticultural Research Institute (HRI) are collaborating by creating a common application form for their respective scholarships. That's a convenient time-saver for everyone involved.

The 2024 Sidney B. Meadows Scholarships are available to students who are currently enrolled in an accredited undergrad or graduate ornamental horticulture program or related field at a four-year, college-level institution in the U.S. Also, students must be a resident of any of the 16 Southeastern states. There are a few other eligibility requirements, too, and you can find out all about it HERE. Applying for their available scholarships is worth it! Last year they awarded 12 scholarships at $2,000 a pop. And here's some other great news: If you previously received one of these scholarships, you can apply for a second award.

There is a deadline, so please do get your applications in by May 31 of this year. You can apply HERE. Questions about the Sidney B. Meadows Scholarships can be sent to info@sbmsef.org, or call 678-813-1880.

HRI's Scholarships

To complement the above info about the Sidney B. Meadows Scholarships, let me tell you about the HRI Scholarship Program. HRI has several endowed scholarship funds that help support students along their journey of nursery and landscape education. Some of these funds include:

- Carville M. Akehurst Memorial Scholarship
- Timothy S. and Palmer W. Bigelow, Jr. Scholarship
- Bryan A. Champion Memorial Scholarship
- Mugget Scholarship
- Spring Meadow—Proven Winners Scholarship
- Wright Family of Alabama Scholarship

Scholarship awards range from $500 to $5,000, and the recipients are selected by the HRI Scholarship Review Panel, based upon criteria established by the donors. Applications may be submitted online (find them HERE) for the 2024-2025 school year now through May 31, 2024. Eligibility requirements and application details for all scholarships can be found on the HRI website.

Input Requested for Nat'l Green Industry Survey

You don't know what you don't measure. To remedy that, the aforementioned HRI is sponsoring the 8th iteration of the National Green Industry Survey. The survey, conducted by the Green Industry Research Consortium and comprised of horticulturists and ag economists, is aiming to do the measuring so the industry as a whole knows more about its production, marketing and retailing practices.

The survey will span a five-year timeline and serve as a critical barometer for measuring the industry. By soliciting insights from stakeholders across the nation—that would be *you*—the Consortium will elucidate evolving trends within our industry. Another key purpose of measuring and asking for industry input is to help the industry as a whole and you individually anticipate what might be coming down the pike. Your participation also helps to bolster advocacy efforts and informs policy decisions at both the state and federal levels.

Everyone in the industry up and down the supply chain is invited to participate. When you take part in the survey, your voice is being heard, and you're contributing to the future of this industry not just for your benefit, but also for the benefit of us all. That's something to feel good about, isn't it?

To participate in this survey, head on over to National Green Industry Survey before May 1.

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



Ellen Wells
Senior Editor
Green Profit

This week's BuZZ! was sent to 25,931 loyal readers!

If you're interested in advertising on BuZZ! contact Kim Brown **ASAP!**

