

Ball Customer Days; 6 Reasons Folks Skip; Persian Violet



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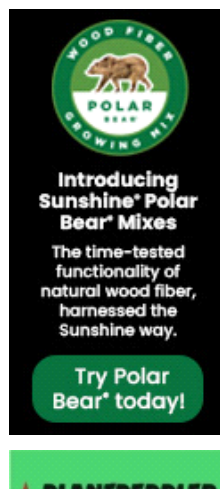


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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

At Ball Seed Customer Days
- Education, Ideas, Tours
Five reasons folks skip a show
Not-gray & old guard
Baltimore nursery tour
Pre-emergence herbicides
More on curcuma
Bee a Winner winner
Finally ...

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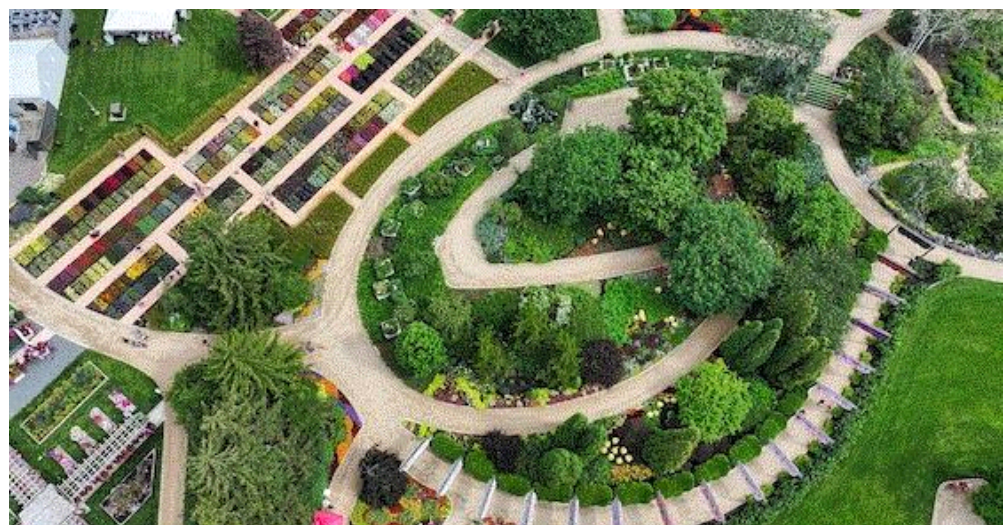
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At Ball Seed Customer Days

My apologies to all 1,680 eager flower fans who attended the annual Ball Seed Customer Days last Thursday and Friday: I forgot to shut the door when I left Florida, and the steamy tropical air followed me up to Chicagoland, making for a sweltering 90F day on Thursday (with 81% humidity!) out in The Gardens at Ball (Friday was overcast and much more comfortable at 82F/72%).

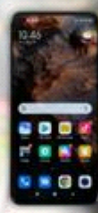


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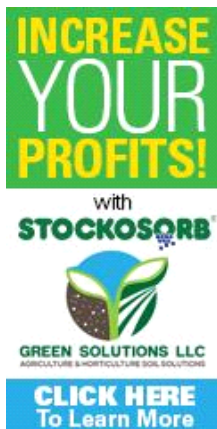

But did we care? No! Because we're plant people, outdoor-types, we're used to the heat, and we don't let it stop us from our daily rounds among the plants. Plus, the Thursday thunderstorm thoughtfully held off until mid-afternoon, by which time the party was mostly over.

Which is why those 1,680 folks (plus some more who came in for an early look on Wednesday) were all smiling and happy—because the gardens were at their absolute best! Even retired Ball breeder Scott Trees, who paid a visit to the gardens July 19, called it on his Facebook page, "the best I've seen over the last 50 years of visiting this magical trial grounds!" And Scott knows quality plants.



I think all 145,000 plants in 1,800 varieties really did look fantastic, thanks to both a good growing season and exceptional work by the grounds crew. There were some 700 introductions for 2026 in the beds, in baskets and in containers, so if you were looking for new genetics, this was a good proving ground. It was also the 30th anniversary of Wave Petunia. The beds of new Easy Wave Pink Pearl were spectacular.





Education

The heat didn't stop attendees from getting smarter at one of the numerous education sessions. Ball tech experts Chris Ferguson and Nathan Jahnke covered calibrachoa; Dave Dowling helped folks out with their Cut Flower Production Practices and Crop Planning for Profit; Candace Wilcox gave a talk on What a New SKU can Do for YOU; our friend Jim Kennedy offered Labor-Saving Hacks for Your Greenhouse; and our own Bill Calkins did LIVE Tech on Demand podcasts right from the garden (with guests Seth Reed and Jaime Kedrowski).



There were also demonstrations of cut flower bouquets, perennial combo planters, annual combo and seed inputs for hanging baskets; and a presentation about Wave's 30th anniversary.

And since Ball Seed represents more than just its in-house breeding companies, you got to chat with representatives from Sakata, Syngenta, American Takii, Proven Winners, Dümmer Orange and Danziger; plus hardgoods suppliers TTA-ISO, Philips, Plant Marvel Laboratories and Oldcastle, American Floral Endowment, AmericanHort, Hortica and Seed Your Future—a full day of networking!



Ball Publishing daughters Arsenal Cuevas and Olivia Zurko encourage attendees to sign up for *GrowerTalks*.

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



Ideas

I like discovering ideas when I tour a garden, and I found a few in The Gardens at Ball. Such as these stacked terra cotta chimney flues.



And an easy way to build a rock garden using flagstones on edge:



NEW FOR 2026

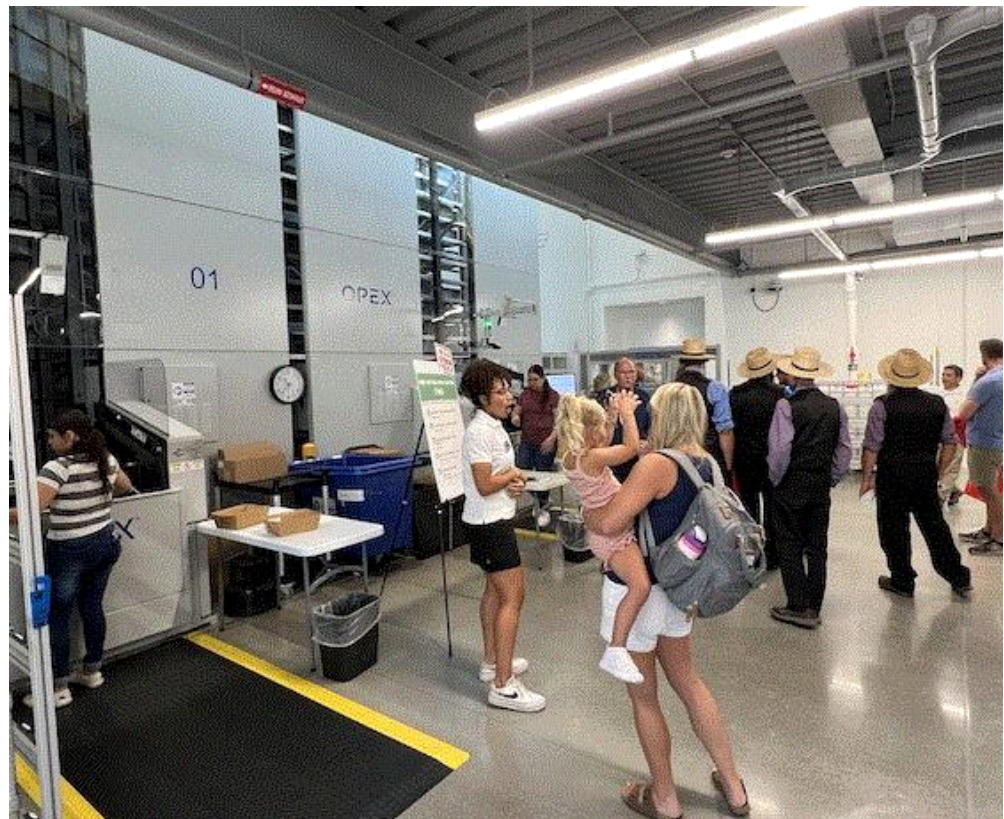


Tours

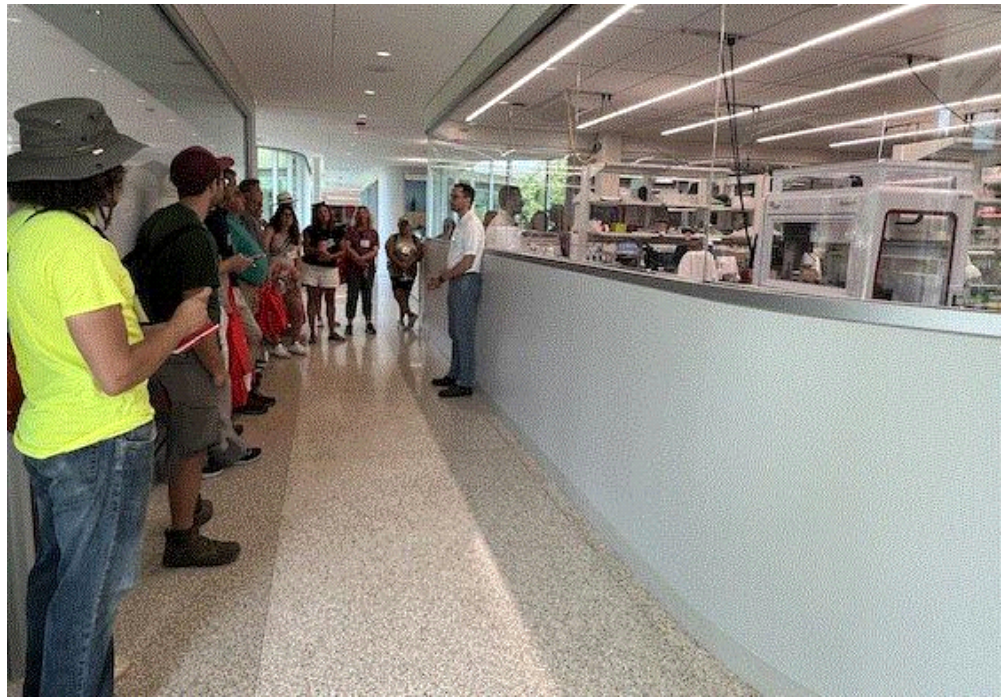
The gardens are impressive, but heck, growers have been impressed by the gardens since the '50s, or even the '40s (nobody is quite sure when the formal "Customer Day" started). But perhaps more impressive these days is a look inside at how they handle all those billions of seeds that get turned into beautiful gardens all around the world.

It starts in the Ball Seed Premier Lab, where every lot of seed is tested for germination and vigor, and then treated or coated appropriately before packaging.

Then it's off to the brand new Seed Distribution Center, where the impressive 32-ft. tall, 106-ft. long Opex Perfect Pick robotic warehouse system can store more than a million packages of seed under perfect conditions and deliver any variety quickly and accurately to the staff, who package and ship it almost immediately (in by 5, out by 7 is their motto!). This computer-driven system stores 50% more seed than their old library-shelf system, is expandable for the future, and requires less labor, especially during peak months. And it helps eliminate errors. Somebody likened it to a vending machine; if so, it's the vending machine of the future!



Lastly, the most high-tech spot on the Ball campus is the Ball Helix R&D Center, where brainy technicians in white lab coats do all sorts of molecular biology, plant pathology, analytical chemistry, tissue culture and more, to aid the corporation's breeding and production divisions. It's so cutting-edge, I can hardly spell most of what they do. Yet Ball lets us all right inside to gape through the glass at the scientists at work.



And as always, we produced a fun video of the event, shot and edited by videographer extraordinaire Osvaldo Cuevas, and featuring some of the great folks from Ball—including Anna Ball and her daughter, Susannah, the third and fourth generation of the family business. Check it out [HERE!](#)



Five reasons (six, actually) some folks skip a show

Last time, I covered the big Cultivate'25 conference and trade show, and we editors speculated a bit on attendance trends—mainly, we think, bringing fewer people and spending less time, due to the high cost of travel. This applies not just to Cultivate, but really any industry event that requires some overnight travel.

But for confirmation, I asked for your opinion on the matter, as you are the experts! Here's a thoughtful reply from Steve Andersen of Andersen's Nursery in Ladysmith, British Columbia, Canada:

A couple of thoughts (more personal opinion) on Cultivate attendance. First off, we did not attend this year for the first time since 2020. You implied that overall attendance was down with the statement, "We do think that there's a shift in how companies attend trade shows."

Politics. *You mentioned in an earlier article that international attendance was down. I suspect that current U.S. president's attitude and lack of respect towards foreign countries and foreign trade may have played a role in the decline of international visitors. As a Canadian, I know that this was a part of our decision not to attend, and I heard from others that did attend say that it was only because they had to go for meetings and such. Threatening to make Canada the 51st state did not sit well with Canadians.*

The Internet. *By the time Cultivate rolls around, most of us have seen a large portion of the "new" and "improved" varieties on the market. While there is nothing like seeing plants in person, trade show plants are not always reality. We also have access to online seminars and various other types of education. Same goes for all of the various hardgoods on the market, where we have access to digital catalogues and photos of new items, sometimes before trade show samples have been produced.*

Hotels. *Unless one books on the day hotels are released (or has a good contact with a company that has a large block of rooms) it is all but impossible to get a hotel close to the convention center, which in my opinion is imperative to get the all-important networking aspect out of Cultivate. In 2024 we registered within a half hour of registration opening, and as (an AmericanHort) member was offered a hotel over a mile away. Fortunately, I had a contact with a block of rooms as mentioned above.*

Flights. *With Columbus being a small destination for air travel, capacity is severely limited, leading to very high prices. We had a supplier offer us an extra room in late June, but by then flights were \$2,500 (CAD) for two with bad connections.*

Time. *Being from a regional airport on the west coast of Canada, it is a full day of flying each way, so this trip becomes five days at a minimum at a time of year when I would rather have my feet in the sand at a beach. Other than Alaskans, we likely make the longest journey to Cultivate of anyone in North America. With the continued staffing issues, holiday time is precious.*

So why do we still go? *Our main reason is to recharge with positive energy after a long hard*

season has burned us out. We get excited again about the industry that we love. Also as mentioned above, networking. We likely get more value out of the contacts that we have made at Cultivate than anything else.

Steve followed up with one more email in which he admitted that another reason he skipped Cultivate this year was to celebrate his wife's 40th birthday on July 12.

"She has spent a lot of birthdays in an airport or airplane over the years," he said, adding, "Honestly, we both really missed Cultivate this year, so we will likely be back to an annual trip in 2026 and beyond."

I hear you on that one, Steve! My birthday is July 9, and I've spent plenty of them at Cultivate. And Laurie's is January 18, a day she has spent on the tradeshow floor at TPIE more than once.



The not-gray and the old guard

Terry Beasley, of Oelschig Nursery in Savannah, Georgia, wrote to say that she doesn't think they've ever sent more than four employees to Cultivate (or other shows) in the same year.

"We try to mix it up by not sending the same employees each time to the same show. In a nutshell, you want to match up the right employee to a given program. This year, we sent Chris Gingrich, who we are hopeful will be taking the Head Grower reins from Pam [Oldfield] in a year or so. We feel it is important to engage those employees that have not turned gray.

"As for the old guard, we are still very interested in the future of this industry we love."

As a card-carrying, graying member of the old guard, I say Amen to that, Terry!



AmericanHort Nursery & Landscape Tour to hit Baltimore

I've been talking a lot about Cultivate, but our national trade association AmericanHort hosts more than just a giant trade show. Such as its annual Nursery & Landscape Tour, slated for September 30–October 1.

This year, the destination is in and around Baltimore, Maryland. The two-day tour will bring together nursery growers and landscape professionals "to explore the shared challenges and

opportunities that drive the green industry forward."

There will be seven stops at top-performing nurseries and landscape operations. You'll get a behind-the-scenes look at innovative production practices, automation, sourcing strategies, native plant trends, crew communications, and real-world installation insights.

Tour stops include:

Babikow Greenhouses (Bedding plants)
Perennial Farm (Perennials, drone use)
Manor View Farm (RFID, Landscape distribution)
Foxborough Nursery (Field plants)
Raemelon Farms (AI-powered farm digitization)
Ruppert Nurseries (Wholesale trees)
Ruppert Landscape (Commercial landscape operations)

AI-powered farm digitization? Somebody tell me what that's all about ...

Registration is \$349 for AmericanHort premium members, \$399 for basic and plus members, and \$549 for non-members. This includes ground transportation, lunch both days and a group dinner.

Spots are limited and filling quickly, so [CLICK HERE](#) for more.



Webinar: Save time, money with pre-emergence herbicides

Some of you know that using pre-emergence herbicides can help reduce your hand-weeding and spot-spraying weed control costs. But some of you might still be skeptical of their efficacy and cost-savings potential. To address that, Envu recently sponsored a third-party study that looks at the actual costs, and savings, that you can expect from a comprehensive weed control program. The results show which products and practices offer the greatest return for your investment. The results also show that your greatest cost is the cost of neglect.

You can learn all about the survey results and the appropriate use of pre-emergence herbicides in a [FREE WEBINAR](#) I'll be hosting on August 27.

I have two guest experts for this webinar.

Janna Beckerman, Ph.D., is the ornamentals technical specialist at Envu and part of their Green Services Team. Prior to Envu, she worked at Purdue University and the University of Minnesota as a professor of plant pathology and extension plant pathologist for 25 years. **Steve Larson**, Greenhouse and Nursery Specialist for Envu, has worked as a grower and a technical sales rep in the turf & ornamental industry for more than 40 years. He has worked in container nursery production, greenhouse crop production and technical sales while working for Hines Nurseries, The Scotts Company, BASF and Envu (formerly Bayer).



With me as your host and moderator, you know it will be fast-paced, informative and fun!

Register [HERE](#).



More on curcuma

This interesting reminiscence is from Heidi T. De Silva of Petersen & Tietz Florists & Greenhouses in Waterloo, Iowa:

"Fun seeing the article about Curcuma. I worked for Ball back in the 1980s and had the profound privilege of traveling to Costa Rica and spending some time with Claude Hope. He sent me back to West Chicago with a cut flower of curcuma and told me that he believed that one day it would be a good pot crop. Claude was truly a visionary."

Isn't that the truth, Heidi?

Say, that puts me in mind of a question: Who are today's visionaries of tomorrow? We need to pick their brains! (If you know the answer, [EMAIL ME.](#))



Monrovia's Bee a Winner winner



When I announce a contest, I like to announce the winner of said contest. Hence, congrats to Rhonda V., who took home the grand prize—a \$500 shopping spree—in Monrovia’s Bee a Winner Contest. Rhonda entered at Begick Nursery in Bay City, Michigan, way up where the thumb joins the rest of the mitten.

All Rhonda had to do was take a picture of her local garden center’s in-store display or a Monrovia plant, then tag the garden center’s location or social media handle. Which she did, and her name was drawn for the grand prize, a \$500 shopping spree at Begick’s. That’s Rhonda with her haul, above.

Begick Nursery has been serving customers in the Bay City, Saginaw and Midland areas for 75 years. The company has participated in the Bee a Winner program since it started three years ago. The owners say they see it as a great tool for teaching customers about the importance of pollinators.

“We participate in the Bee A Winner program because Monrovia’s pollinator-friendly perennials support a healthier, more resilient ecosystem,” says Mark Begick. “During the promotion, I highlight these plants on our socials to show clients the diverse options they can use in their own gardens.”

Monrovia created the Bee a Winner pollinator plant program to help garden centers generate more, er, buzz for pollinator-attracting plants. The giveaway, which offers garden center customers a chance to win a free plant, is easy for both retailers and their customers.

“Home gardener interest in pollinators continues to grow and expand,” says Katie Tamony, chief marketing officer at Monrovia. “They are looking for new ways to attract bees, butterflies and other pollinators to the garden. Our Bee a Winner program is a fun and easy way capture shoppers’ attention at retail and gives garden centers an opportunity to educate their customers on the many different types of pollinator-attracting plants.”

Interested in participating in next year's Bee a Winner program? There are two program phases to match your location's peak season. Spring registration deadline for Southern states is February 27, 2026, and the summer program deadline is March 13, 2026. Talk with your Monrovia representative and visit the [Bee a Winner page](#) to learn more.



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Finally ...



Another potted crop sighting, this time one of my personal favorites: exacum, aka Persian violet.

It was one of the first weekly potted crops we grew at Indian River Ornamentals back in the '80s. I can still smell the unique fragrance of the flowers coming out of the fans as we drove by the greenhouse. And I remember those Styrofoam boxes that Earl J. Small shipped them in, each wrapped in its own separate brown paper sleeve. *(Pro tip ... not that it will do you any good now: It was easier to shake each little plant out of its pot while still sleeved rather than unwrapping each plant.)*

Priced at \$14.98, these were grown by Dewar Nurseries in Apopka.

Got a favorite potted plant or supplier story? Email me [HERE](#).



Feel free to email me at beytes@growertalks.com if you have ideas, comments or questions.

See you next time!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Chi'.

Chris Beytes

Editor-in-Chief

GrowerTalks and Green Profit

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