

Landscape Design Awards, CAST, Poinsettia History & More



News and commentary for the nursery & landscape market

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Nursery & LANDSCAPE INSIDER

News and Commentary for the landscape and nursery market

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

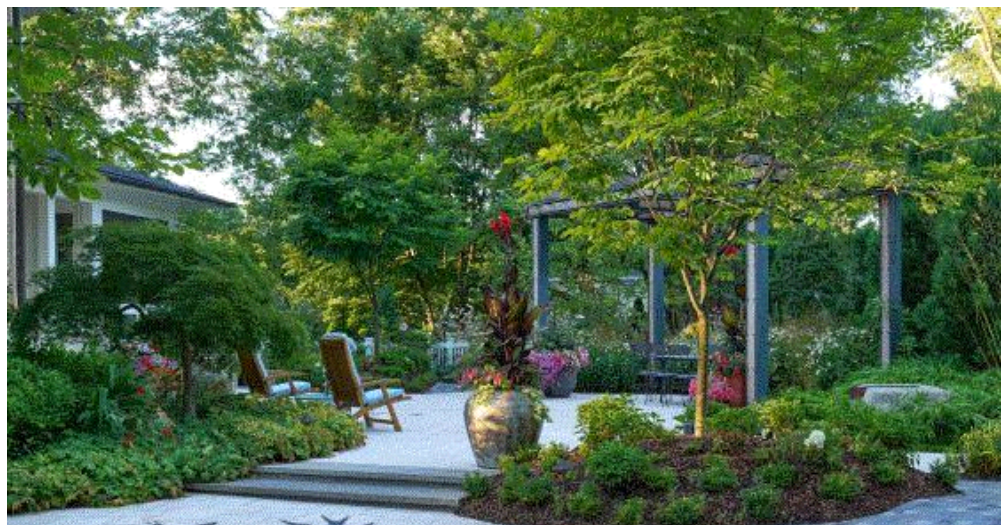
2026 Landscape Design Awards
Are We Already Talking About CAST?
ProGreen 2026
Horticulture for the Holidays



PPA's 2026 Landscape Design Awards

Do you know of someone with an exceptional landscape design? Perhaps you've had a recent design and installation that has filled your office with pride, and you think is deserving of additional recognition. If this is the case, you should consider submitting an entry into the 2026 Landscape Design Awards program. Since 1992, the Perennial Plant Association (PPA) has recognized extraordinary design projects that highlight the use of herbaceous perennials to develop immaculate and timeless landscapes.

As with any landscape, aesthetics are just the surface; the awards take into consideration use of different and unique plant materials, themes, and, of course, maintenance. Judges evaluate outstanding designs and select the best entries based on several categories, including using new cultivars, exciting color combinations and seasonal flair.





"The Mosaic," CLINTON+RIES Landscape Architects—Winner of the 2025 PPA Landscape Design Award of Merit.

I want to highlight that these awards aren't just for the biggest and most iconic firms. Both experienced and novice designers are encouraged to apply. You might not realize it, but brilliant ideas and designs are common across all levels of the industry.

There are eight categories for entries based on residential, commercial, educational, temporary and seasonal designs, as well as price of production. Winners will be recognized in several ways to support further promotion of your firm, including at the PPA Symposium, via press releases, social media and a full-length article. All this publicity is sure to drive clientele to your door, so what have you got to lose?

You can find more information on the program [HERE](#). Applications are due January 28, 2026 with winners notified in March.



Are We Already Talking About CAST?

You know, it's never too early to start planning for spring travels. I imagine spring is a very busy time for most people reading this, so taking some additional effort to plan early will help make sure you can participate in one of the most important annual trips. Of course, I'm talking about the California Spring Trials—more affectionately known as CAST. This year's trials will be March 24 – 27, 2026, which is a Tuesday through Friday, a slight deviation from previous schedules.



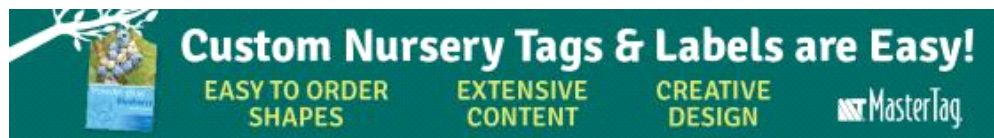
For those who aren't familiar, CAST is one of the best opportunities to explore new and upcoming flower varieties and releases. For four days every spring, breeders and plant brands open their doors to show off all the new plants in some fantastic settings. Nearly all the big plant brands and breeding companies participate with open houses set up on facilities or nurseries throughout southern to central California. Each will come with a theme and unique offerings to set the mood. You can try to catch them all or just pick the stops that interest you most. It's really an action-packed four days and an experience you'll keep with you for years.



Some of us get to go every now and then, but some lucky folks are able to attend CAST each year. Thankfully, the Ball Publishing team shares that luck with all of us, as they bring us highlights from all the stops along the way. If you aren't able to make CAST yourself, make sure to follow Chris Beytes, Jen Zurko, Bill Calkins and Osvaldo Cuevas on their adventure through the [GrowerTalks YouTube Channel](#) and [Acres of Buzz Newsletter](#).

Even more exciting for anyone planning to attend, the *GrowerTalks* Team have done all the research on how to get the most out of the trip. You can visit the *GrowerTalks* CAST website [HERE](#) for anything you might need. From info on all the stops, down to the most important details of where to eat and stay, they have you covered.

If you want even more information, be sure to check out the official [CAST website](#). Here you can register and find additional details about the individual stops, breeders and programs. Make sure you register in advance and be sure to watch the times, as some stops have unique hours for public.



Looking Forward to ProGreen 2026

Speaking about planning well in advance, I'm excited to share that I'll be visiting Denver, Colorado, this upcoming February to attend the ProGreen Expo. This year's show will be held from February 3-5 and is expected to draw a great crowd. From wholesale growers and retail operations to landscape contractors, architects and arborists, there's certainly something for everyone.



I love attending trade shows and I really like to get to a new show when possible. As this will be my first time at ProGreen, I'm excited to explore all that the show has to offer. I was cruising through the website a couple days ago and was pleasantly surprised by the education program lineup. So many amazing presenters and such a full agenda, I can't believe I haven't been here before. I'll be speaking the morning of Thursday, February 5 and sharing some of our latest findings from our nursery production and substrate research lab, but much of the excitement will be early in the week.

The show is presented by the Colorado Nursery & Greenhouse Association, the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado, and Garden Centers of Colorado. With these three groups combining their efforts, it's no wonder that any member of the green industry will benefit from attendance. Why not take a break from the winter weather and come support the green industry associations and pick up valuable knowledge, skills or connections that will help your business grow?

Check out the show's website [HERE](https://www.ProGreenEXPO.com) for more details and information. Hope to see you there!



There's Nothing Like Horticulture for the Holidays

As any good nerd, I like to spend much of my free time reading, which has resulted in volumes of useless information. I thought why not share some of that Christmas-themed information with you as a happy holidays wish. (Advanced apologies, as this is a long one!)

I started thinking of fun ideas to spread holiday cheer and my first inclination was to write about the connection between horticulture and the holidays. If you think about it, most of our holidays are centered around some horticultural theme. Fall holidays like Halloween and Thanksgiving have pumpkins and mums, Easter has lilies, Mother's Day has carnations. Even St. Patrick's Day could be said to have clover—or potatoes if you count them as horticulture. (Side note: I remember going to St. Patrick's Day parades in Louisiana where they tossed potatoes and found it quite unique.)

If you think deeper, you get even more connections. Valentine's Day and roses are well established, but you can even make the case for chocolate, a product of the cocoa plant.

As this article is already shaping up to be long, I'm going to skip the ethnobotany lesson, but there are several major reasons why our cultures developed a direct kinship to horticulture and hold plants on such a high pedestal. Perhaps this is a concept I can explore in a future column.

Some of our holidays seem to be horticulturally limited or void of horticulture, and maybe we should try to rectify that. I mean, why don't we have a traditional Fourth of July plant decoration or gift? That would be a good tradition to push to boost to the industry.

But, in my opinion, no holiday has more horticultural connections than Christmas. The first thing that comes to mind is the iconic Christmas tree. Now, my forestry friends might try and claim this one, but, no, it's horticulture. We also have Christmas cactus and don't forget the boughs of holly or what happened underneath the mistletoe last night. However, I think the poinsettia is uniquely positioned to represent Christmas's horticulture tradition.

Without offending anyone, I would honestly say that poinsettias offer nothing but holiday cheer. Hollies are fantastic 365 days a year and most Christmas trees are also very profitable forestry products—not to mention New Year's bonfires and a way to make excellent [artificial reefs](#) or [limit coastal erosion](#). Can you think of another benefit to the poinsettia? It doesn't color up naturally in most areas due to societal light pollution, they're (still) considered by many consumers to be mildly toxic, and if planted outside will stretch into an unattractive "weed" and die with cold "Christmas" weather in most of the country.

With all these issues, we still love them and without a doubt one of my favorite plants to bring home to "cheer" up a porch. The classics are my favorites, but there are so many exciting new varieties each year. I was actually reading about new poinsettia varieties in a [recent Acres Online newsletter](#) and something hit me. How in the world did a tropical foliage plant from Mexico take the entire Christmas holiday by storm and become one of the most iconic holiday plants of all? Well, it's actually a very interesting story and I'm going to share a not-so-much abbreviated version, although I highly recommend you take a few minutes research the history of poinsettias. It really is a fascinating tale and part of horticultural history.



A poinsettia display made by the University of Florida Environmental Horticulture Club for their annual poinsettia sale.

The poinsettia started out as a medicinal plant used by the Aztecs—or at least that's where I pick up the story. The plant became popular hundreds of years ago and for much of the same reason it's popular today. The Aztecs called the plant *cuetlaxochitl*, and as *cuetlaxochitl* naturally "bloomed" (not really a bloom, but you know what I mean) in December, the association with Christmas grew. In the 1600s monks in Mexico used it to decorate nativity scenes.

This connection grew so much that it spawned a Mexican legend about a girl named Pepita. Pepita was visiting her local chapel for a Christmas celebration and wanted to bring a gift for baby Jesus. With no money in hand, she decided to pick wildflowers on the roadside as a gift. With her generosity and dedication to kindness in hand, upon entering the chapel the flowers transformed into a beautiful bouquet of *cuetlaxochitl* flowers (again, not flowers—bracts).

Over time the name gradually transitioned into the Christmas Eve Flower, or actually it was *La Flor de Nochebuena*, because it was still just in Mexico at this time. Eventually, the plant was brought to the United States by Joel Roberts Poinsett (I think I see where the name comes from) in 1828. Joel was the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico and a botanist, placing him in a perfect situation to introduce the plant to the U.S. Fun fact: He was also the co-founder of the National Institute for the Promotion of Science and Useful Arts, which later became the Smithsonian. Joel cultivated the plant in his South Carolina greenhouse.

Eventually, Robert Buist, a Pennsylvania nurseryman started cultivating the plant for sale and it remained a novelty in the U.S. horticultural trade. The explosion of poinsettia plants as a Christmas staple didn't happen until the 1900s. Paul Ecke, Sr. developed a method to cultivate plants indoors on a mass scale and pushed for the poinsettia to be a Christmas staple. Over the years, adoption and paid promotion by Hollywood helped engrain the poinsettia as a symbol of Christmas. In the 1990s, USDA-ARS Scientist Ing-Ming Lee discovered that infection with a microorganism, *phytoplasma*, would result free branching of poinsettias, highlighting a first where disease resulted in a more commercially desirable crop.

Today, poinsettias are an icon of Christmas and deeply ingrained in the global Christmas culture. The U.S. Congress designated December 12 as National Poinsettia Day—serendipitous, as I'm

writing this on December 12. According to the internet (which incidentally never lies), there are 35 million finished poinsettia plants sold each year in the span of about three weeks. Now that's impact. Years of improvement has led to the massive diversity in poinsettias we see today. From the classic scarlet red to white, yellow and pink, from solid to speckled, spotted and splotched, there's certainly a poinsettia for everyone out there. I would wager to guess there's one on your porch or mantle right now.

Think big,



Jeb Fields

Editor-at-Large

Nursery & Landscape Insider

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