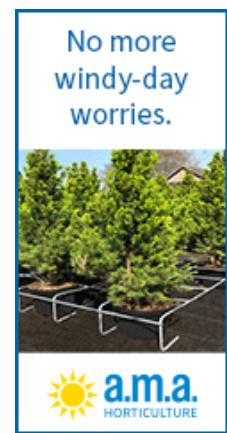


A Euro Christmas; plus, what coffee shops, free stuff and sticks have in common

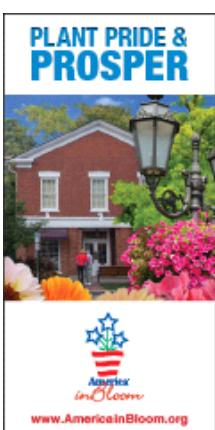


TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2025

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COMING UP THIS WEEK:
Euro Christmas Trends
Real Trees But Different
PHS's Top Gardening Trends
Five More
Coffee and Houseplants
Gardening Book Alert!
And Somewhat Related ...



Euro Christmas Trends

Friends, I certainly hope you haven't had enough of the year-end holidays because these first two items are full of design ideas—with a Euro flair, thanks to my Amsterdam-based friend Stacy Sirk. Stacy, who is a [trend spotter and retail consultant](#), noticed two trends while knocking around Europe this season.

Here's the first, in her own words and pictures.

"The first is that advent candle displays have totally taken over as a design idea that has moved from the traditional advent wreath, to something everyone in Europe seems to have now. It somehow has morphed into more of a celebration of the season, the Winter Solstice, seasonal change—every culture has some celebration of light in the winter, from Diwali to Hanukkah. Here are just a few examples of how beautiful and elaborate they are becoming."

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Real Trees But Different

Stacy's other design idea is one I think your design team could have so much fun with. It's pre-decorated Christmas trees but made from trimmed tree branches. "No actual tree is cut down," Stacy told me. She noticed that the green version has been around a few years but "now the foliage is more diverse, and some are being completely pre-decorated. Something new!"





I've seen a version of the green-only but dressed up as a garden gnome. I do like this version, though. Actually, wouldn't it be fun to have a small "forest" of the plain ones with a smaller gnome version peeking out from behind?

Just some ideas from overseas! If you have some new design ideas for the holidays, send them to me—happy to share.



PHS's Top Gardening Trends

If you read my *Tropical Topics* newsletter then you know that I included a few newly released top gardening trends for 2026 from the folks at Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. In fact, PHS listed 10 top trends, and I'll quickly go over each below, explaining how gardeners of all experience levels may be engaging with their outdoor and indoor spaces in the year ahead. I'm up for the task!

Gardening innovations. The garden space is ripe for great ideas and smart design. The plants and products PHS called out here have another common thread: a growing focus on sustainability and versatility.

PHS specifically called out the glow-in-the-dark Petunia Firefly, known for its genetic modification that allows for its petals to lightly illuminate in the dark, adding to the plants' visual appeal even after hours. Also on the list of garden innovations is 2nd Sand from Organic Mechanics, a sparkly soil topper and amendment for houseplants and terrariums that is made from recycled glass, and the Climb-itt line of plant-based poles and other plant support products from the folks at leafjoy.

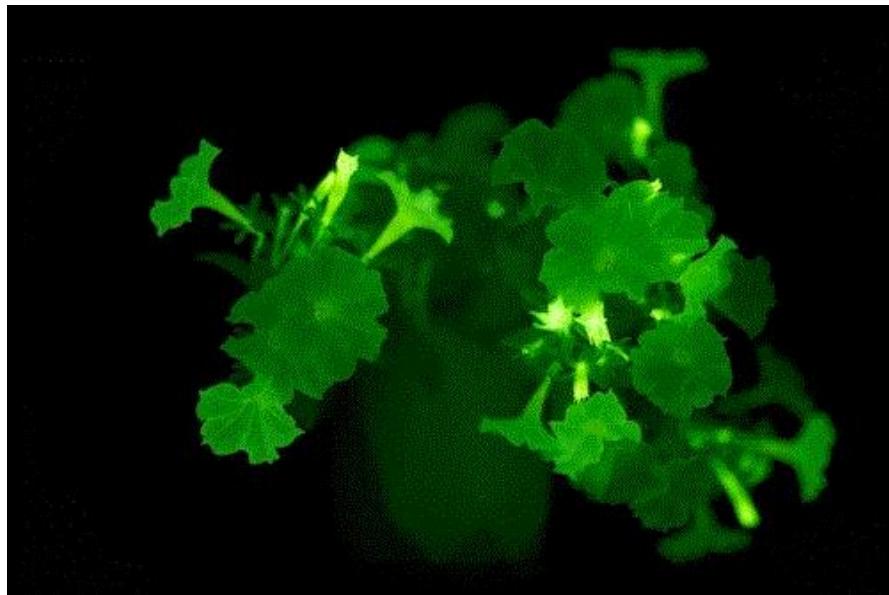


Photo credit: Light Bio

Rewilding. This is a trend where folks let a portion of their properties—whether a small yard or a larger parcel of land—return to its wild state. PHS explains that this is not simply a matter of letting the landscape “go wild.” Rewilding is more intentional and is conducted with an emphasis on allowing native species thrive while deterring invasives.

Gravel gardening. We’re talking xeriscaping here, and it’s gaining in popularity due to both community water restrictions and its appearance in public gardens such as Chanticleer and Olbrich Botanic Gardens. In early 2026 author Jeff Epping will release a book on the topic explaining both the aesthetic and environmental aspects of this trend.

Growing cut flowers. Have you noticed all the boutique flower farms that have emerged across the country over the last decade? Perhaps you have one yourself! The cut flower movement reflects a growing interest in locally grown flowers that are fresher, more seasonal, and often cultivated using sustainable practices. You can get in on this by growing your own flowers for cut-your-own bouquets, as well as offer all the supplies and education folks will need to grow a cut flower garden of their own.



Photo credit: Andrew Bunting

Garden to the max. More is more with maximalist garden design, which celebrates the art of bold spaces where creativity and color take center stage. Teresa Woodard's [Garden to the Max: Joyful, Visionary, Maximalist Design](#) promotes bold and abundant garden design, perfect for gardeners who don't shy away from a profusion of color in the garden.

Still managing retail inventory based on gut instinct?

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Five More

Continued from above.

Houseplants! The current houseplant phenomenon with its roots in the COVID pandemic, really opened a world that helped to make gardening accessible for anyone regardless of space. Some of the trending houseplants that PHS called out are monstera, philodendron, pothos, kokedama creations, the hedgehog-type sansevierias and the leafjoy line of houseplants from Proven Winners.

Fruit growing. Home fruit growing continues to rise with several organizations hosting festivals and dedicated efforts to promote specific fruits. Such as? Well, in the South, the native paw paw is seeing huge interest and cultivation. Other emerging fruits include Asian and American persimmons, figs and serviceberry. Even within the city of Philadelphia itself a resurgence of fruit growing is happening, thanks to Philadelphia Orchard Project that promotes the cultivation of all kinds of fruiting plants. Get involved with a local organization so you can answer questions—or maybe even start that organization yourself.



AI and gardening. Artificial intelligence is finding its way into the garden via design and plant ID apps. We've discussed the obviously AI-generated plant images that are all over social media, along with the offer to sell those fake plants. Be vigilant! Customer education is really the best way to help folks realize you are a way more trustworthy purveyor of plants.

Hydrangeas! Hydrangeas aren't so much a trend as force in the garden and landscape. As a garden retailer you cannot turn your attention elsewhere for too long. PHS points out that new varieties come to market each and every year—in fact, they call out First Editions *Hydrangea paniculata* Spring Sizzle and Bloomin' Easy's *Hydrangea paniculata* Bubble Bath.

Gardens that support ecology. Many of the trends listed above can be a benefit to the environment and support a host of ecological functions. PHS specifically mentions increased interest in native plants, reducing lawns, creating habitat for overwintering insects and supporting programs such as their own Gold Medal Program that highlights exceptional trees, shrubs and perennials that support ecological health.



That's a lot of trends! Focus on a few, the ones that you feel you're best able to address and would have the most buy-in from your community—then give 'em all you got. Which will you focus on in 2026? Drop me a line about it [HERE](#).

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Coffee and Houseplants

How many years have garden center consultants been advising their IGC clients to open a coffee bar in their establishments? Lots! What if some coffee shop consultants have turned the tables and are advising their coffee shop clients to start selling plants?

That's what it looks like might be happening in Los Angeles, California. Suntory's Delilah Onofrey sent along [an article from the L.A. Times](#) that highlights the different coffee shops in town that also offer gifts for sale (legit gifts, not just coffee-related accoutrement). Of the 15 featured, I counted at least five who sell plants or flowers.

Take Javista at the Atrium in West Hollywood, for instance. According to the article, the second floor of the establishment is filled with plants, pots, grow lights and such, and also hosts plant-related workshops.



(Lisa Boone / Los Angeles Times)

The sisters who own Sachi L.A. in Del Rey opened a straight-up coffeehouse then opened a retail location right next door, selling houseplants, gifts, vintage clothes and plant accessories. I'd call that the best of all the very trending worlds.



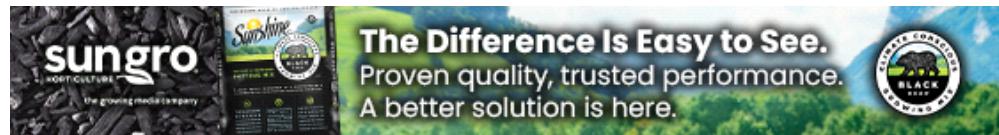
(Lisa Boone / Los Angeles Times)

There's also Creature's Plants & Coffee in Eagle Rock. It's also two-building operation where they sell plants, gifts and garden supplies in one unit and organic drinks and pastries in another. It also features a 50-foot greenhouse with plenty of plants for sale. Said store owner Hope Creature, "A lot went into making this space architecturally stunning as well, with every design detail considered. The space also serves as a platform for our ongoing community programming, which showcases what the space is all about—bringing people together to explore, learn and connect." Creature's Plants & Coffee is built as a purposeful third space. I'm positive there is a couch on the property, if not several.



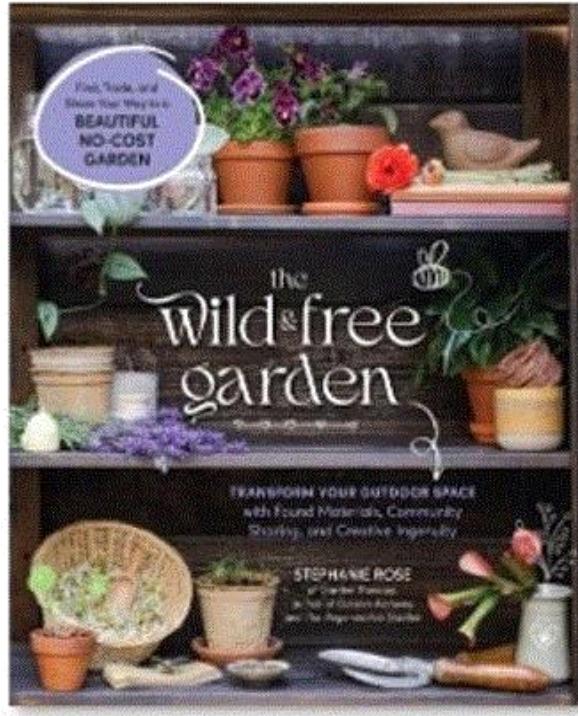
(Jess Stephens / For The Times)

Makes you wonder what other adjacent retail opportunities there might be out there for IGCs aside from coffee. [Any ideas?](#) A rare and exotic motorcycle renovator near me—[Madhouse Motors](#)—opened a coffee shop, so maybe one of you who loves to tinker on old machines could open a repair shop. Lawnmowers would be fitting.



Gardening Book Alert!

I have a gardening book suggestion for you that kinda-sorta relates to what Hope Creature is creating at her L.A. coffee and plant shop. The book is called "The Wild & Free Garden: Transform Your Outdoor Space with Found Materials, Community Sharing and Creative Ingenuity" by Stephanie Rose. Founder of [Garden Therapy](#), Stephanie offers a design-forward approach to creating beautiful outdoor spaces using found materials, free resources and community connections.



The book, which publishes in late February, focuses on no- and low-buy gardening, upcycling and creative reuse. Stephanie offers guidance on sourcing high-quality materials through the sharing economy and designing gardens that reflect personal style while reducing waste. The book includes step-by-step projects, ideas for seed swaps and tool-lending libraries, and strategies for collaborating with neighbors on shared infrastructure like greenhouses and rainwater collection. It's a resource for gardeners looking to build thoughtful, sustainable spaces without relying on high-cost materials.

Yes, I know you sell things. Free and low-cost isn't really supportive of your business model. Or ... is it? Can you gather customers around a community table and offer free advice and consultation? Can you offer workshops that help gardeners forage for natural materials to add to their landscape? Can you host a plant swap or garden/outdoor-related tag sale? Building and growing community goes a long way in building your bottom line.

Whatever you do or host or offer, perhaps this book could be there along with it. It'll be published through Quarto.



And Somewhat Related ...

I was watching CBS Mornings the day after Christmas and saw a [segment about sticks](#). Yes, sticks!

The segment revolves around Stick Nation, an online community of people passionate about sticks, which they believe connects them to childhood wonder and nature. Stick Nation was created when Logan Juggler and Boone Hogue, friends from Utah, found some really cool sticks that looked like other things while on a hike.



The community has grown to more than 4 million members from 120 countries. The community rates sticks on a scale from 1-10, with unique features like "nude" sticks (without bark), "animal" sticks and "artillery" sticks, among others. The community seems to be a wholesome and non-controversial group (rare for online groups!), focusing on the joy and imagination sticks inspire. I mean, who hasn't looked at a stick and thought, "Geez, that looks like Snoopy"? Child-like play ... wasn't that a trend for 2026?

Here's your mission for 2026: Start a local Stick Nation chapter. Because we really do need some joy and imagination in our lives.



If you have any questions, comments, suggestions, etc., drop me a line if you'd like at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



Ellen Wells
Senior Editor-at-Large
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