

Adapt or Die, stylish signs, lots of AIB news and how is spring?



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

How's Spring So Far?
Reinventing Barlow's
Stylish Signs
Adapt or Die
News from AIB
Many > One
More Plant Days



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How's Spring So Far?

Waking up to temps in the low 30s yet again this week, I'm beginning to think spring doesn't exist in New England anymore. One day it'll just suddenly be 70F and above for the ensuing four months. In the meantime, we're bundled up and raking our leaves, building our soil and watching the thermometer.

The folks at [Taskrabbit](#) have sent along the garden/yard work and restoration task requests they have seen gaining the most traction on the do-it-for-me platform. Considering it's the beginning of spring, a lot of these task requests are clean-up and glow-up related.

Such as? Here's a rundown of the key terms and the percent they have increased:

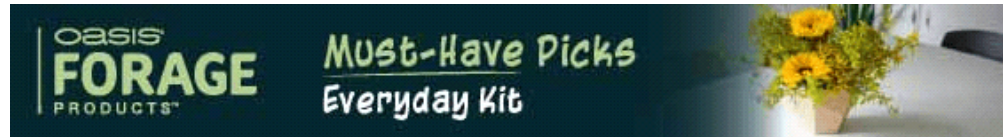
- **Clean-up related:** Garden - 28%, gardening - 51%, lawn care - 49%, grass - 70%, planting - 29%



- **Plant related:** Flowers – 24%
- **Restoration and repair:** Restore – 45%, restoration – 39%, vintage – 26%, repair – 27%, fix - 15%

I tell you, with the five galvanized steel raised beds I've purchased and my aching back, I should probably consider getting a Tasker to set up and fill them all.

How is spring itself looking in your neighborhood? And are sales acting accordingly? I'd love to get your thoughts on your spring season so far. Drop me a note about it [HERE](#).



Reinventing Barlow's

The following item about how one garden center is adjusting to the changing times comes from my colleague Jen Polanz.

I first noticed the Facebook posts last spring announcing the closure of Barlow's Flower Farm in Sea Girt, New Jersey, after 42 years in business. I remember visiting many moons ago on a retail tour and loving the place (I always liked the look of their X.S. Smith greenhouse). They received an outpouring of sentimental messages from long-time customers then and when they announced the final closing in the late fall.

BUT, this story has a happy ending because the Barlow family has opened up their 22-acre production farm in nearby Wall Township for retail with a seasonal garden market, called Barlow's Farm & Flowers. The difference, of course, will be its seasonal nature—with the store open April 15 through June 15 and then reopening again in September for fall décor.



Another difference is the re-focused retail offerings: mainly live goods, along with mulch and soil. This is what they wrote on the website:

"Our Seasonal Garden Market is an open-air retail space located right here on our farm. Rather than a full-scale garden center, the market focuses on what we grow best — strong, healthy plants suited to our local growing conditions. Visitors will find a wide selection of annuals, perennials, shrubs, evergreens, vegetables, herbs, and tropicals, along with high-quality soils and mulches to help your garden thrive. By operating seasonally, we're able to offer plants at their peak and provide excellent value on fresh, farm-grown selections."

Through the wholesale side of the business, they cater to landscapers and garden centers, as well as offer plants for fundraising programs.

Find out more about the new setup at the [Barlow's FAQ page](#).

I love this idea, Jen! Nothing fancy—just high-quality plants and a farm-to-garden shopping experience.



Stylish Signs

Liz King, a long-time *buZZ!* reader and occasional newsletter respondent, recently reached out to share a new horticulturally-aligned small business she's been developing: the [Stylish Sign Shop](#). Her focus is on ready-to-use, thoughtfully designed signs, social media graphics, and

Before launching this venture, Liz spent nearly two decades as a graphic designer for a tech corporation, followed by 10 years running her own design studio, Dreaming in Color Design. With the Stylish Sign Shop, she's excited to blend her lifelong love of plants with her passion for design.



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6 Plant Pack	\$3.00
8 Plant Pack	\$5.00
12 Plant Pack	\$8.00
16 Plant Pack	\$10.00

And let's not forget that store signage is also part of the customer experience. Liz thinks carefully about how shoppers interact with displays. "I want it to be something they relate to—something that brings excitement into their garden center space," she said. When done well, signage makes the store intuitive to shop, educates and inspires customers, and takes some of the repetitive questions off staff shoulders.

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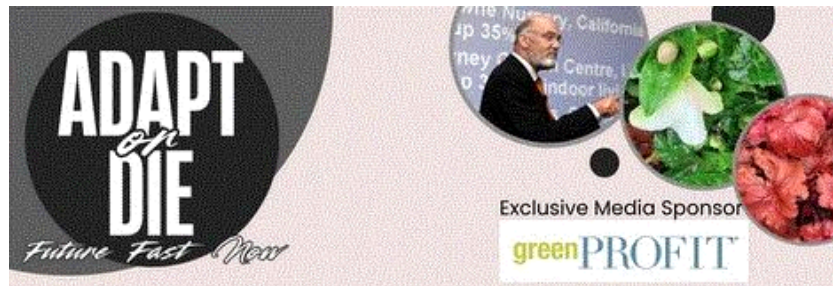


- **John Stanley (Australia):** One of the world's leading garden center consultants, working with centers in 35 countries including the USA. John will present "What in the World is Happening and What Are the Opportunities for Your Business" and "10 Steps to Grow

Your Business in 2027.”

- **Dries Jansen (Netherlands):** A global garden center designer and data mining specialist, presenting “Do You Really Know Your Market? Grasping the Hidden Opportunities.”
- **Sid Raisch (USA):** A nationally recognized advisor and consultant, presenting “How to Get Your Fair Share from Every Paycheck,” a proven playbook for competing with Amazon, Netflix and big box retailers.
- **Rachel Reynolds (USA):** A visual merchandising expert presenting “Beyond Pretty: How to Approach Merchandising at Your Garden Center.”
- **Mark Huber (USA):** Director of Sales at The Perennial Farm with 35+ years in independent garden centers, presenting “The Perennial Way.”

“The garden center industry is at a convergence point with plants, emerging technologies and competition,” said Mark in a press release on the topic. “We put this day together because we know there are owners and managers who are working hard but feel like they’re falling behind. This program gives them insights, tools and renewed confidence.”



Sid’s statement on this professional development event is this: “While plants are still where our industry is rooted, we must constantly advance how we do business. It is ‘plants as usual,’ but it isn’t business as usual. We have to be smarter about how we show up to run the business and for how we show up for the customer. Independent garden centers can absolutely out-compete and win in the era we’re entering with AI, humanoid robots and whatever is to come, but only if we play it on purpose.”

The day kicks off at 8:00 a.m. with morning coffee, a private farm tour and optional one-on-one sessions with speakers. The full program runs from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and wraps up with a round table discussion featuring all five presenters.

Seating is limited and tickets are priced at just \$165 per delegate (bring a guest for just \$40). Super affordable considering the speakers, the content and how this day can become a turning point in the future of your business.

Register [HERE](#).



News from America In Bloom

America In Bloom’s latest newsletter was packed with lots of great information. Did you get it? If not, here’s a recap of some of the cool things they have going on:

The launch of the “Gardens Across America” program. This is a certification program that recognizes gardens that contribute to community vitality, beautification and environmental stewardship. And it’s open to all sorts of gardens! You could have a cozy backyard, a landscaped business storefront or a public demonstration garden—whatever it is, you’re eligible! What matters for this program is your commitment to fostering beauty and sustainability in your

community. Heck, I can think of a dozen eligible gardens right now—and one of them is probably your store. Learn more about the program [HERE](#).

Upcoming webinar on starting a 501(c)(3) for your local “In Bloom” program. Community activism is often best served up in the form of a nonprofit organization. Many America In Bloom communities want to go in that direction but figuring out the steps can be quite the hurdle. AIB will present a free webinar on Tuesday, May 19 at Noon Eastern that will help folks understand the 501(c)(3) process from the ground up. And the best thing is you’ll learn this from a community that has already gone through the good and the bad of the process. Register for the webinar [HERE](#).

Here’s a recorded AIB webinar I will definitely watch—it’s about the essentials of planning and planting a rain garden. I’ve got a troublesome spot where my driveway meets my lawn and it’s a small pond after every major rain event. Educate yourself or your staff on the essentials: where rain gardens work best, how to choose the right plants, tips for maintenance and educating folks on their environmental value. Watch the free webinar [HERE](#).



The 2026 America In Bloom Symposium & Awards Celebration heads to our nation’s capital September 24-26! Registration for the event and all it has to offer—like tours and brilliant educational sessions—is now open. The symposium annually brings together community leaders, volunteers and garden advocates who all want to create more beautiful and welcoming places to live, work and visit. Learn more and register [HERE](#).

Many > One

Coming to you sandwiched between 2026’s Earth and Arbor Days, I have an article for you that speaks to both. It comes from TheConversation.com, and it’s about how the many are greater than the one when it comes to trees.

As part of the United Nation’s Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), there’s a plan to plant 1 trillion trees. Oftentimes when a large tree-planting initiative is undertaken, it ends up being a monoculture of the same tree. Monocultures are often much more vulnerable to pests and diseases, and in the case of trees, they are also much more vulnerable to fire.

This article introduces us to the benefits of not just planting trees, but of planting forests. Forests are a mix of different tree species, and as such “mirror the biodiversity of a natural forest, ultimately creating forests that grow faster and are more resilient in the face of constant threats,” the article states.

The article highlights the work going on with the ecosystem-scale experiment called [BiodiversiTREE](#), where they planted 18,000 trees of 16 different native trees on 60 acres near Chesapeake Bay. Thirteen years later, the results are in: Bigger trees, a denser canopy that provides cooler shade, more caterpillar communities, fewer leaf pathogens and more bugs, birds

and creepy crawlies. All of these things are good for building a forest community and also a climate-alleviating functional forest.

It's an [interesting read](#) and it could help you inform your customers or landscaping clients. Plant a tree on Arbor Day? Plant many different ones!

More Plant Days

With just a week left in April, I thought I'd let you know about the plant-related "National Day of" days for the coming few weeks.

- Peggy Riccio, Education Chair for the Herb Society of America, wrote in to tell me about National Herb Day on May 2 and the ensuing National Herb Week from May 3-9. Head over [HERE](#) for all things herbs, including recipes and ideas you can share with your customers.
- May 2 is also World Naked Gardening Day. It's also the Kentucky Derby, a.k.a. "the Run for the Roses." Let's hope a jockey doesn't confuse the two.
- May 3, as I told you a few weeks ago, is National Wave (Petunia) Day, and it's also National Garden Meditation Day.
- May 8 is National Iris Day.
- As everyone reading this should know and prepare for, Mother's Day is May 9 this year. And hopefully by then I can pack away my hat and gloves for the season.

Have a "holiday" suggestion to share? [Tell me about it!](#)

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

Green Profit

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