

My South Florida Trip, Industry Updates & More

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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- My South FL Trip
- Excelsa Gardens & Kigelia
- FNGLA Lifetime Awards
- PDSI's Cultivate Reveals
- New AmericanHort CEO
- Monrovia's 100th Celebration
- NJ Box Tree Moth



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A Trip to South Florida



I spent last week on another nursery road trip, this time through southern Florida. I was able to visit several nurseries on my way to attend the Florida Nursery, Growers, and Landscape Association (FNGLA) Annual Convention in Coral Gables, Florida. This was my first time at the convention – and I had a blast.

The Convention theme was Carnival of Color, and what a fitting depiction of South Florida's horticulture industry. As I visited nurseries, gardens and just viewed overall landscapes, they seemed to be splashed with vibrant colors that define many of the tropical plants. The convention was designed for fun and networking, something that seems to often take a backseat to work at many meetings. All the events revolved around socializing and coming together with the industry and it really works.



Marcella Lucio-Chinchilla delivers her presidential address.

The meeting was held in the historic Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables, which was one of the fanciest buildings I've ever been allowed to visit! Having dinner in the veranda while wild parrots fly around and call out is a unique experience in its own right, also fitting to the Carnival of Color theme. I would highly recommend the convention to anyone in Florida. This is an incredible group and they really know how to have a good time while being productive.



Along the way, I got to visit several growers. I don't get to South Florida a lot, so when I do I take the opportunity. Dade County is the largest nursery county in the country, and the sheer productivity down there is staggering. I visited some major national production operations and some local spots—one in particular was a great native nursery that showcased just how many unique native trees and shrubs thrive in southern Florida. We were able to visit large tropical production sites that serve a wide portion of the country. You know much of the topical plant materials sold at independent garden centers around the U.S. come from south Florida.



We also saw the behind-the-scenes logistics of online plant sales—a concept that is rapidly growing and seems to cause unique headaches for growers looking to adapt.



Of course, I am always there to assist with production issues. From extreme temperatures to snails, the industry presents several challenges that keep my job interesting.





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Stop at Excelsa Gardens and *Kigelia africana*



One of my favorite stops of my South Florida road trip was at an incredible tropical nursery, Excelsa Gardens Nursery. Before I get too far ahead of myself, I am 100% a woody flower shrub guy. The classics have always been my favorite and I will never change, but every time I visit south Florida, I am amazed at the diversity and splendor of tropical plants. They are just so unique and beautiful—it is truly a different world down there.

Anyways, I was invited to talk to a group of growers in Loxahatchee, Florida, as part of the Palm Beach FNGLA Chapter meeting. We were treated to a meeting at Excelsa Gardens Nursery, which had one of the most exciting and artistically created office entrances and reception areas I have ever seen. The whole nursery looked like a well decorated interiorscape and retail center, but it was just the production area.

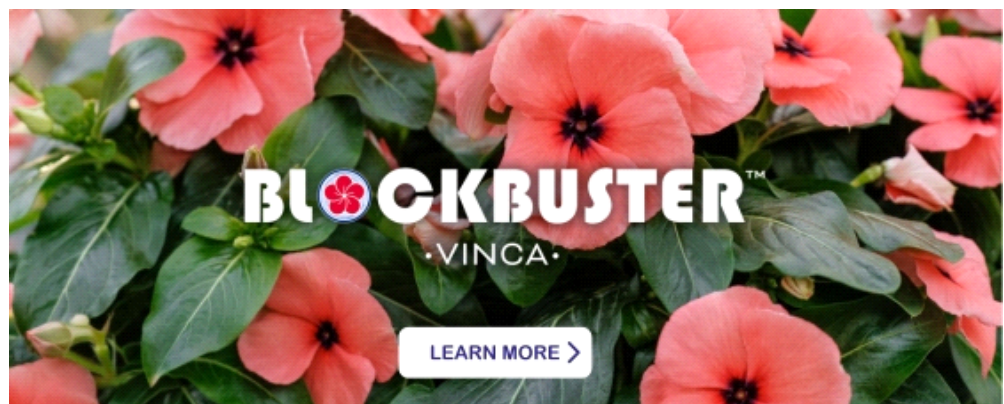


Once the wow factor that I was in a tropical paradise subsided, I was immediately stopped by a crazy tree I had never seen before. It was a great shade tree that had a very tropical look. What

struck me was these very long hanging flower branches that opened up to gorgeous tropical bell-shaped flowers—which I later learned are bat-pollinated. As I was staring blank-faced at this tree, Colin, the owner, told me that is a *Kigelia africana*, or potatoes tree (which after some research I found is also called sausage tree in some parts of the world). The fruit that forms look like giant hanging potatoes (or sausages) and is a very starchy and heavy fruit. Colin told me that it is commonly consumed by rhinos in Africa, which is just about as fun of a plant insight as you can get. There were a few small fruits left on the tree, but after some searching, I found that the fruit can actually grow up to 2 ft. long and weigh 22 pounds! A very cool plant that was new to me that I wanted to highlight. Moreover, it does say online that this is a primary diet for many large herbivores, including rhinos and elephants—talk about your conversation piece plant.



The *Kigelia africana* tree has flowers that hang down on long herbaceous stems.



FNGLA Lifetime Awards

During the FNGLA's Annual Convention there were several members of the industry who were recognized for their dedication and advancement of Florida's green industry. Two received very special career recognitions that I thought would be prudent to share as their efforts have likely touched many readers. I also apologize as the ceremony was so incredible that I just soaked it in and did not get up to take photos!

The Wendall E. Butler Award is recognized as FNGLA's most prestigious award for industry members who have shown exceptional service to the environmental horticulture industry and left a lasting mark on Florida's horticulture industry. This year's recipient was Jerry Stageman of Sunset Specialty Ground Covers. Jerry has been working in Florida's ornamental industry for decades and is most recently known as the father of Ornamental Peanut, an incredibly popular groundcover and turf alternative that has been critical to the sustainability of Florida's water resources.

The second award I wanted to mention is the FNGLA Hall of Fame Inductee. This is truly a lifetime achievement award with Florida's nursery and landscape industry. These nominations are selected for a career of success, achievement, dedication, and service. This year's inductee was George Hackney Sr. of Hackney Nursery in Quincy, Florida. George has been a lifelong member of the nursery industry and has been revolutionary in his contributions to the U.S. nursery industry. From his early career as a nursery salesman to buying a nursery and transforming it into a national name, George has been incredibly impactful in the U.S. nursery industry and built a generational nursery that his family continues to operate to this day. A truly deserving recipient.

Congratulations to both Jerry and George!



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PDSI to Reveal New Introductions at Cultivate

Cultivate is almost here. In just a few short weeks thousands will join the nation's largest and most impactful horticultural trade show in Columbus, Ohio. There is so much to do at the show, from the educational sessions to making critical business connections—it is the place to keep at the forefront of the industry. One of my favorite parts is seeing all the new plant materials that are set to hit the market next year.

Plant Development Services Inc. (PDSI) will be debuting several vibrant introductions designed for a new era of “dopamine digging” where landscape color, sensory beauty and simple garden rituals become everyone's ultimate reset. “For busy gardeners, a burst of color from a beautiful bloom can be what beckons them outside, giving them a reason to slow down and reset,” says Kip McConnell, Vice President of Business Development with PDSI.

There are so many new releases scheduled to hit the market from PDIS, I thought I would share what I expect to be some of my favorites—although, I truly can't make that call until I swing by their booth.

Who doesn't want more compact loropetalum? Purple Raindrops delivers year-round saturation of rich purple foliage that never fades. Its compact, mounding form creates a soft flowing presence as the pink fringe-like flowers add an extra splash of color. Maxes out a 2 to 2.5 ft. tall!



You know I'm in a tropical mood these days, and nothing says tropicals like hibiscus. Cirque de Bloom are low-effort shrubs that come with oversized blooms in red, white or pink. These put on a show as their name implies, providing dramatic foliage and a striking focal point to energize the landscape. I think my favorite is the white.



There are a few additions from the Butterfly Candy collection of Buddleia, and I think I am going to really like Li'l Magenta. This dwarf butterfly bush has a robust bloom color that sticks around, providing tons of flower power throughout the season. This would look amazing in containers!



Rounding out my too early to tell list of favorites from PDSI is the newest Encore Azalea, Autumn Queen. This new Encore has a bold dose of fuchsia on single blooms that are accented by dark freckles. This reblooming azalea keeps going from spring through fall, drawing attention to the garden. A perfect way to add lasting color to the landscape.



AmericanHort Welcomes new CEO

Earlier this month, AmericanHort welcomed their new President and CEO. Lionel van der Walt was appointed to the position by the Board of Directors effective June 2, 2026, succeeding Ken Fisher who spent 10 years in the position. When it comes to leadership, Lionel is a seasoned vet, bringing more than 20 years of executive leadership, driving growth and transformation in various sectors from high-tech startups to non-profit associations. He is known for his strategic, collaborative leadership style, where he brings a unique blend of operational expertise and a strong track record of building value into member-driven organizations.

“After a comprehensive national search, we are confident that Lionel van der Walt is the right leader to guide AmericanHort into its next chapter,” said Kent Fullmer, Chair of the AmericanHort Board of Directors. “His work experience, global perspective and his collaborative style will be instrumental as AmericanHort continues to advocate for and support the horticulture industry.”

In past roles, van der Walt served as Chief Commercial Officer of Nallian, a technology company in the air cargo industry. He has served as CEO and Executive Vice President of the International Institute of Building Enclosure Consultants and President of Cargo Network Services. He also has served on various industry and community boards including Cristo Rey Network and the

Smart Supply Chain Alliance Advisory Board. He holds a Master's in Business Administration from Milpark Business School in South Africa and was an officer in the South African Air Force.

"It is a true honor to be selected to lead AmericanHort at such a pivotal time for the green industry. I have deep respect for the organization's mission and the vital role our members play in both the economy and our communities," said van der Walt. "This industry is built on a foundation of passion and hard work, and it is a privilege to serve the businesses that represent the heart of horticulture. I look forward to listening to our members and working together to build upon the association's strong legacy of advocacy and growth."



Monrovia's 100 to Feature Breeder Showcase

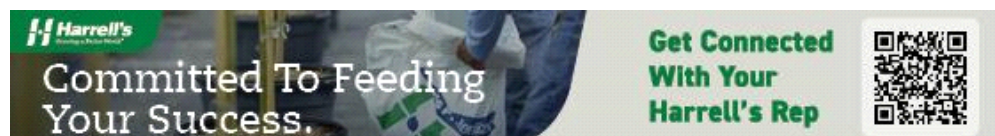
MONROVIA® This year marks the 100th year for Monrovia. That is an incredible milestone for any business, and that longevity is a testament to the impact of Monrovia in the horticultural industry. To honor the achievement, Monrovia is hosting a Centennial Celebration Week,

which will include the largest interactive perennial and shrub showcase in the West. This celebration week runs from August 24 – 28 at the company's headquarters in Dayton, Oregon. In addition to the showcase, they will offer nursery tours, new plant presentations, marketing clinics and retailer workshops. A 100th Anniversary party with special guests, dinner and entertainment will round out the event. This celebration runs in concurrence with Farwest, so you should already be in Oregon!

Some of the world's leading plant breeders will have their newest selections available to view in Monrovia's trial gardens, which are headed up by Trials Manager, Fela Lafi, and Georgia Clay, Monrovia's New Plants Manager. Breeder representatives will be on hand for the entire five-day event, answering questions and presenting new genetics. Contact your Monrovia representative for more information about attending this event.



"As we celebrate 100 years of Monrovia, we are excited to welcome our partners and customers to the Oregon nursery," says Jonathan Pedersen, Monrovia President and CEO. "This year we're celebrating more than just the legacy of selecting and growing the highest quality plants. We're honoring all those that made it possible and focusing on an exciting future for our industry."



New Jersey Box Tree Moth Quarantine

A little local news for anyone in New Jersey or working in the area. The United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services—better known as USDA-APHIS, has confirmed Box Tree Moth (*Cydalima perspectalis*) at private residences in Cape May County, New Jersey. A quarantine has been initiated for the movement of live or dead Boxwood plants in and out of Cape May County.

The Box Tree Moth is a federally regulated pest that primarily feeds on boxwood species. If left unchecked it can cause significant damage and even death to these popular evergreen shrubs, which have an estimated annual value of about \$140 million nationwide.

While just a handful of properties have been confirmed, the pest is a strong flyer, and can easily spread 6 to 20 miles a year. Control measures have been implemented. If you live in the area, monitor your plants for damage, which includes brown leaves, defoliation and webbing with caterpillars. Contact New Jersey Department of Ag or Rutgers Extension office if you suspect pest presence. You can find more information on Box Tree Moth and management [HERE](#).

Think big,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeb Fields". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Jeb Fields
Editor-at-Large
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