

Farwest's RCAs and 2027 Garden Trends Part I



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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And a Few More
Other Than Trees & Shrubs
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Show-Up Culture

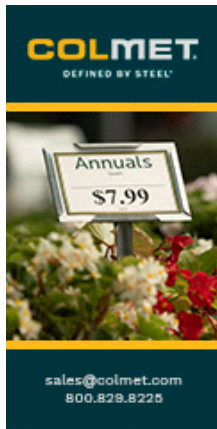


Farwest's RCAs

The 2026 edition of the **Farwest Show** took place last week in Portland, Oregon. That show, too, has a group of retailers just like you that scour the show floor looking for prime items worthy to receive a Retailers' Choice Award. Headed by The Garden Center Group's Danny Summers, these retailer volunteers found dozens of items that they would sell in their own garden retail operation.

The following 15 items took home an RCA. We'll quickly give you two right away, as they have received RCAs from previous events—which means I've already written about them and you likely already know about them. Those two are:

Centennial Ruby Bigleaf Hydrangea from Monrovia, which won an RCA at Cultivate'25. This is the wine red-flowered hydrangea released in honor of the company's 100th anniversary. And



while everyone talks about how gorgeous the flowers are, I would add that my specimen bounced back amazingly well after my horrible treatment of it prior to planting. Beauty and resilience!

The other previous RCA winner is the just-released **Heuchera Fyre Wing series** from **Terra Nova Nurseries**. In fact, I just wrote about it receiving an award about six weeks ago, so it should be fresh in your memory. The series of seven different colors of deeply lobed—dare I say frilly!—leaves are a first of their kind in this category.



Tree & Shrub Winners

Since the Pacific Northwest is home to a great many shrub and tree nurseries, many of the RCA winners reflect that.

Dark Mode Diervilla from **Bailey Nurseries**. This is an upright variety with purple-black foliage that holds steady. Occasional yellow flowers add some multi-season contrast. It's compact, too, and stays at around 3-ft. tall by 3-4 ft. wide.



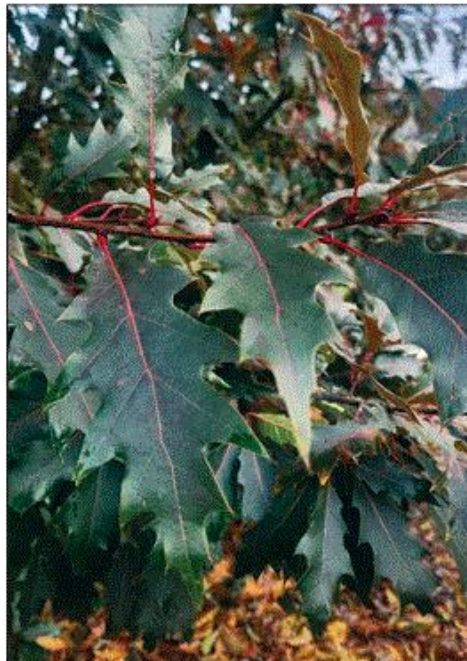
Ginkgo biloba Troll Dwarf from **Blue Heron Farm**. And do they mean dwarf! Troll may reach 4-ft. tall and 3-ft. wide over the course of 10 years, making it just the right size for containers, fairy gardens and small landscapes. This is a male-grafted clone, so no seeds (and no horrible smell).



***Cercis canadensis* Whitewater Weeping Redbud**, also from **Blue Heron Farm**. I love a weeping redbud and this one tops it with stunning variegation. In spring, its deep rose-purple, flowers give way to leaves that are mostly white with green flecks, maturing to mostly green with white flecks.



Saturnalia Oak from Heritage Seedlings & Liners. This is a hybrid of Silverleaf (*Q. hypoleucoides*) and Red Oak (*Q. rubra*) found among seedlings grown at Heritage Seedlings & Liners. Red-blushed new leaves mature to glossy dark green with acute lobes and thick texture with a silvery green underside. Long lasting fall color is bronze-green to rusty red. Many of its attributes, such as a vigorous upright growth, a strong leader and widely adaptable make it an excellent choice as an urban tree nationwide. Grows to 25-ft. wide by 40-ft. tall and is hardy in USDA Zones 5b-9b.





And a Few More

Coral Spear Crabapple from **J. Frank Schmidt & Son**. Coral joins Ivory and Raspberry in the Spear line of upright crabapple trees. Deep pink buds open on this narrow upright crabapple, which maintains its dark-green, disease-free leaves throughout the season. Small yellow to gold fruits are ready by fall. Grows to 20-ft. tall and 8-ft. wide. Hardy to Zones 4a–9b.



Crimson Feathers False Spirea (Sorbaria) from **Monrovia**. What a colorful false spirea! Bright golden to chartreuse leaves feature deep scarlet-red new growth. The red color holds into summer. Clusters of white flowers bloom in July. This easy-care shrub requires little to no pruning to maintain. It reaches 5-ft. tall and wide and is hardy in Zones 2-10.

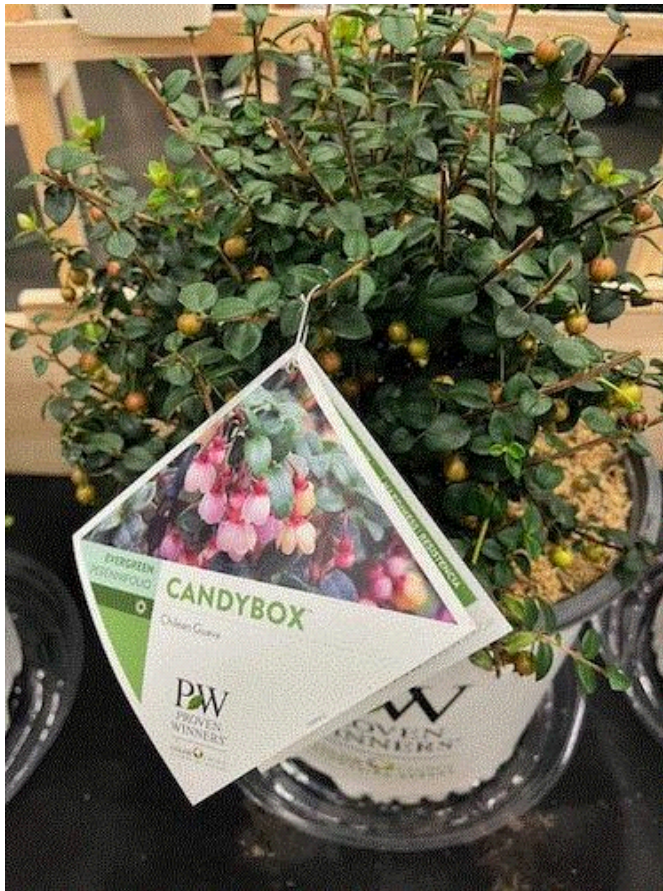


Featherman Chastetree (*Vitex negundo heterophylla*) from Proven Winners ColorChoice.

This new Chastetree was hybridized by Carol Robacker at the University of Georgia and introduced by Proven Winners ColorChoice Shrubs/Spring Meadow Nursery. It has dense, deeply cut foliage and hidden sterile flowers. This carefree plant withstands drought, heat and snow. Grows to 2- to 3-ft. wide by 3- to 5-ft. tall and is hardy to Zones 5a–10b.



Candybox Chilean Guava (*Ugni molinae*), another one from Proven Winners ColorChoice. Hybridized by Viveros Hijuelas of Quillota, Chile, and introduced by Proven Winners ColorChoice Shrubs, this compact form of Chilean guava makes an excellent drought-tolerant hedge. It produces delicate, silky flowers in summer, and actually produces fruit, too! Grows to 2- to 3-ft. wide by 2- to 3-ft. tall and is hardy to Zones 7a–9b.



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Something Other Than Trees & Shrubs

How about a grass? Here's ***Ophiopogon planiscapus* Edge of Night Mondo Grass** from **Iseli Nursery**. A pin-striped version of black mondo grass, this one has a very narrow white stripe running down the outside edge of each blade. It gives the garden a luxe modern look while staying tidy.



Calluna Bud Bloomer Series (*Calluna vulgaris*) from **Qualitree Propagators**. This heather series of several colors features dark-green foliage with colorful, urn-shaped buds from late summer into fall. The flower buds are urn-shaped and are long-lasting. What wowed the judges was the brilliance of the colors.



Surprisingly, at least for me, is that three plants you would expect to see at a show like TPIE won RCAs at Farwest. I'm just going to mention them here and provide more details in the next issue of my *Tropical Topics* newsletter coming out next week.

- **Variegated Hawaiian Banana (*Musa x Paradisiaca AeAe*)** from Van Wingerden Greenhouses

- **Alocasia Zebrina** from Youngbloom Nursery
- ***Philodendron nangaritense*** also from Youngbloom Nursery

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But Wait, There's More

It's not only The Garden Center Group-backed RCAs that are awarded during Farwest. Attendees and official Oregon Association of Nurseries judges choose winners, as well.

The People's Choice Best of Show Award winner is voted on by show attendees visiting the New Varieties Showcase, and this year the majority of the votes went to **Sofia Cherry Laurel** (*Prunus laurocerasus*). This same plant won an RCA at Cultivate this year, so it must be a great plant! Introduced by [Concept Plants](#), Sofia is an easy-care ornamental cherry with fine-textured foliage in a compact habit of no more than 40-in. tall. Hardy to Zones 5a-8b.



In addition to the People's Choice Best of Show award, the professional judges awarded the New Varieties Showcase Judges Choice awards, which went to **Saturnalia**, which we mentioned above. With that dark green color with red highlights, it sure is a good-looking tree.

GMG Digs for Dopamine

If it's September, then it's another edition of Garden Media Group's thought-provoking garden trends. The [2027 Garden Trends Report](#) was released to the world this week, after GMG President Katie Dubow's sneak preview at Cultivate. As I do each year, I'll take each of the seven trends and really dig in to the reasoning for each one, revealing what it means for you and how you can employ them in your operation. We'll end with the Trend Report's pick for Color of 2027, which, if timed just right, will dovetail into the release of other organization's color picks.

But first, let's go over the theme of this year's Garden Trends Report, "Digging for Dopamine." What is it? It's a chemical messenger in the brain and body that helps control movement, motivation and the feeling of reward. That feeling you get when you dink in pickleball or airmail your bag in cornhole or find a funny video on social media—that is a hit of dopamine, and that's why you are up for another.

Why did Katie and the GMG crew name the 2027 theme for a neurotransmitter that pings at our reward system? I asked Katie, and here's what she said.



"Digging for Dopamine" is our name for what happens when the easy hits—the endless scroll, the latte, the same day delivery—stop feeling like enough. We check our phones on average 205x/day; the 206th time isn't going to make us feel any better. People are craving something slower and realer, and gardening has always been that. It's the dirt under your nails, the sore feeling after a day spent planting and weeding, a wait worth having, a payoff you can see grow. 2027 is the year the green industry gets to be the antidote, not the alternative.

We all know that the garden holds the key to both calm and creativity. Those are both states that people are looking for as an antidote to the feelings our modern society stirs within us.

Now, let's see about the first trend.

Show-Up Culture

Screens are no longer producing those dopamine hits we're looking for, hence the Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year for 2020, "doomscrolling." Instead, folks are putting down their phones and other screens and looking for ways to digitally detox. Hanging out with others? According to the Garden Trends Report, for folks who grew up on social media even the thought of creating "the perfect hang" is anxiety-provoking.

That's where "soft socializing" comes in. Soft socializing is a low-pressure approach to hanging out around a shared hobby or activity, not a forced conversation. Go out for drinks? No, thank you. Go out for a drink and trivia night at the local pub? Maybe. Board games and crafting? Yes, definitely. My [local general store](#) has a "get together and read silently" book club, which is the epitome of the soft socializing.

As the Trend Report says, the activity takes center stage, erasing much of any awkwardness people may experience. And, by doing a stress-reducing activity together, friendships develop organically over time rather than feeling forced. According to data from Eventbrite, 89% of young adults want events that connect them to community, such as block parties, markets and "Meet Your Neighbor" events.

Green Profit contributor Katie-Elzer Peters has been extolling the virtues of crafting gatherings for months (if not years) now. Give your customers a low-stakes reason to be at your store.

- Art-with-plants classes
- Flower-arranging events
- Community planting
- Learn-a-new-garden-skill workshops

How about hypertufa? Kokedama? Maybe some “woodworking for gardens” type class? I’m there for it. And by the way, wreath-making season will be upon us before you know it.

Have you seen success with low-pressure activities? If so, [let me know](#) what you’ve offered and I’m happy to share it with your peers. Stay tuned for another trend next week!

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



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[Green Profit](#)

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