

Features

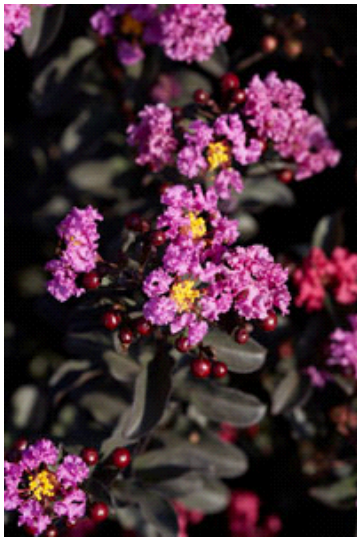
10/1/2017

A Ground-Level View

Katie Elzer-Peters

The end of a GWA: Association for Garden Communicators annual conference expo is a bit of a feeding frenzy as writers, radio personalities, podcasters, photographers, designers and videographers lay claim to the display plants. We're always excited to be among the first to trial a new plant and broadcast our findings over Instagram.

I polled movers and shakers after this year's conference in Buffalo, New York, (a gorgeous garden tourist destination—who knew?) to see what caused them to “forget” an extra sweater in the hotel room and make room in their suitcases. A few trends emerged.



Taking it to the Limit: Zonal Denial

Maybe zonal denial isn't the right word, but we're talking about things like crape myrtles and azaleas in Zones 5 and 6. Jo Ellen Meyers Sharp, the Hoosier Gardener, said, “If there's any one thought that permeated the #GWA2017 Expo, it's temptation, as in: ‘Go ahead and try this shrub in your USDA Zone 5 garden, even though it's rated to USDA Zone 7. Push the envelope and see what happens. You know you've got a protected place where it could go. Heck, add a shovelful of hope and what can you lose?’”

She continued, “So, I indulged my zone envy and brought home Black Diamond Purely Purple Crape Myrtle, one with beautiful foliage and the promise of flowers and survival. With the opportunity to trial out-of-zone plants, I get to see what happens with this J. Berry Nursery introduction.” The J. Berry

booth was packed throughout the conference, generating a lot of interest in their tropical Hollywood Hibiscus line, as well.

Autumn Bonfire Encore Azalea sparks enthusiasm for Chris Link, co-owner of Plant Addicts. “I'm really excited for this one. It is a beautiful shrub for small spaces that only gets 3-ft. tall, but has terrific dark green foliage all year,” Chris says. “And it is cold hardy up to Zone 6!” The shrub is part of both the Sunset Western Garden and the Southern Living plant collections. PDSI had a booth full of gorgeous plants. Their variegated podocarpus, Roman Candle, caught my eye as something different.



Foliage is Still Flourishing

I will beg, borrow and steal to get my hands on the ornamental oregano Kirigami from PanAmerican Seed next year. Technically, it's a flowering plant, but the greens and subtle pinks of the showy bracts will function more like foliage and will last longer than fussy annual flowers. The website listing describes it as, "Heat and drought tolerant, with an eye-catching display of texture from spring until autumn."



Bloom Power

Foliage is trendy right now and we'll get to that, but nothing beats the old-fashioned appeal of a beautiful bloom. Katie Rotella, who represented multiple brands at the show, said that the Pentas Lucky Star series received a lot of interest, particularly the Violet and Dark Red. "I heard multiple people say, 'Everything old is new again.' The writers appreciated fresh breeding and a new perspective on 'old fashioned' plant classes." I'll admit that I stopped and fawned over the pentas.

Teresa Speight of Cottage in the Court in Washington, D.C. was over the moon for the trademarked Lavalamp Moonrock Hydrangea, saying "It caught my eye when I saw it down the aisle. Those fluffy, perfectly conical, bodacious blooms of this hydrangea captured my heart! I NEED this plant for real!" Somebody else snapped it up before Teresa could lay claim. (Bloomin' Easy, maybe you can help a girl out?)



Problem Solvers

Author and regional expert Dee Nash gardens in the unforgiving climate of Oklahoma. She said, "I chatted with Weeks Roses and they are excited about the shrub rose Top Gun (Rosa WEKmoridahor) because it has shown resistance to Rose Rosette Virus in their test gardens." Dee has had to rip out tons of roses because of this disease and her heart breaks a little each time. She says, "Maybe Top Gun is the first in a line of resistant roses from hybridizers. I also like the dark red color. I am always looking for true blue-red garden roses that will retain their color in Oklahoma's harsh summer sunlight."

A one-and-done sunflower is a let-down for many gardeners, so syndicated Detroit columnist Nancy Szerlag wants to get the word out about the new Sunfinity Sunflower from Syngenta. She sings its praises as a container flower, cut flower and landscape plant. "It took almost 10 years of breeding this interspecific

hybrid—the crossing of two species within the same genus—to produce this fantastic bloomer. Sunfinity is a multi-branching beauty that rises between 36 to 48 in. in height and expanding 24-in. wide while producing fabulous blooms throughout the growing season.”



Don't Forget Food

“As a food gardener, I’m always on the lookout for new edibles to grow in my backyard farm, so I was really excited to see Candy Cane Red Pepper,” wrote Niki Jabbour, author of the best-selling “Year-Round Veggie Gardener.”

“This new snack-sized variety is very early to mature—awesome for my short-season garden—and bears peppers that are both sweet and beautiful. The fruits are green, ripening to bright red with eye-catching white stripes—even the leaves are variegated! Can’t wait to grow this in 2018 in pots and my raised beds.”

Carol Michel, author of “Potted and Pruned: Living a Gardening Life,” tends what she calls a Vegetable Garden Cathedral in Indianapolis. She says she’s excited about Burpee’s new paste tomato, Gladiator. “They sent me a trial plant and I found out first-hand that those tomatoes are big and meaty and true to advertising. They also didn’t have any blossom end rot. Good-bye, Roma. Hello Gladiator.”

Garden communicators look at a lot of plants, so if they’re stoked about something, you can be sure your customers will be, too. **GP**

Katie Elzer-Peters is a garden writer and owner of The Garden of Words, LLC, a marketing and PR firm handling mostly green industry clients. Contact her at Katie@thegardenofwords.com or at www.thegardenofwords.com.



The editors at *Green Profit* would like to congratulate the author of this story, Katie Elzer-Peters, on being named the GWA Emergent Communicator for 2017. She’s certainly earned that distinction through hard work and dedication!