

Cover Story

3/1/2022

Warm Weather & Cool Products

Ellen C. Wells

2022 marks the first live and in-person Tropical Plant International Expo since 2020 and also the first time it's been held in downtown Tampa—clear on the other side of the Florida peninsula from its usual home in Fort Lauderdale. The change in locale, the upbeat attitude of buyers and vendors, and the predictably warm and welcoming weather made TPIE 2022 a show to drive the industry enthusiastically into the post-pandemic year ahead.

If there were detectable themes to the non-plant products that caught attendees' attention at TPIE, you could say they were poles, pots and plant supports, with a number of these products winning Cool Product Awards from the cadre of retail judges scanning the show floor on behalf of The Garden Center Group.

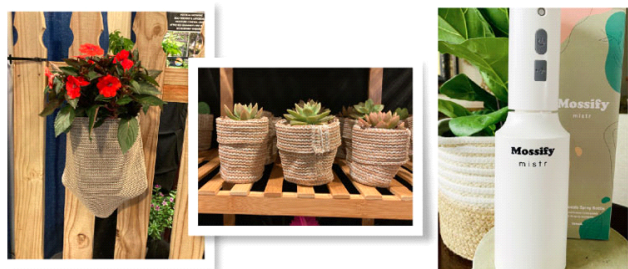


Oh My Macrame

Macrame, jute and seagrass hangers, pots and covers from Creation Jute. These Bangladeshi-made hangers, pots and covers are knotted, braided and otherwise assembled mostly by hand! This extensive line of plant hangers and deco containers will bring great joy to and admiration from any '70s fan. (This is another Cool Product Award winner, by the way.)

Pockets for Plants

Plant Pockets from Ecological Protective Solutions (EPS). EPS has been making erosion-control products, including a product called Dredgesox—knitted, high-density polyethylene mesh, for 23 years or so (their first erosion-control installs are still intact, so that speaks to the longevity of the product). Plant Pockets are made from the same or similar material for both consumer and grower/nursery applications.



On the consumer side, folks can either plant directly into the bag or use it as a decorative nursery pot covering. On the grower side, planting directly into the bags adds the benefit of airflow to the roots, which makes the roots and plants healthier and larger—30% to 40% bigger, EPS has found.

They offer a bunch of different sizes—3-, 4-, 6-in. and 1-gal. bags, plus custom sizing—all of which can expand

due to the nature of the material. I also like the vertical Plant Pockets, which I believe have grommets for easy hanging. What I like about these bags is the coloring and texture, which reminds me of nature grass or jute material, but with greater durability. Oh, and they're washable, reusable and made in the U.S., too.

Misters, Modified

mstr from Mossify. A double Cool Product Award winner, Mossify's continuous mister solves an achy problem: Its continuous misting stream doesn't require pumping or squeezing to create a fine aerosol. Just click it once and the mstr offers a continuous stream. This ingenious device saves you from some serious aches and pains in your hands and forearms.



Plant Poles

Bendable Moss Poles and Bendable Coir Poles from Mossify and Expandable Moss Totem Poles from Aroid Greenhouses. These two different companies have two similar products—and each won a Cool New Product Award for them.

Of Mossify's two poles, the Bendable Moss Pole has a greater diameter and thicker lay of moss, which is a great surface for aerial roots to grip onto. The Bendable Coir Pole is the smaller diameter of the two and is better suited to supporting vines. Both are bendable, allowing the user to create shapes and essentially dictate the direction in which the supported plants will grow.

Aroid Greenhouses' Expandable Moss Totem Pole is a hollow tube wrapped in moss. One end has a stick that inserts into the ground or pot, and the other end has an open top. This open-ended design allows you to connect pole upon pole. As your plant grows, so can the supports it grows on. The poles come with a cap to close off the open top.

Woven and Weatherproof

Bohemian Collection of Indoor-Outdoor Planters from Pottery Pots. Another Cool Product Award winner, these indoor-outdoor weather-worthy planters feature a natural woven bamboo exterior with a concrete/fiberglass liner. The liner helps protect the bamboo from water leaching from watered nursery pots. The planters also have a pluggable drainage hole and two feet to keep the bamboo up and off the ground or patio.



Waste Not

Xaxim Pots from BioFink. These pots look like they may be a coir product, but they're actually made out of palm tree waste. Did you know that during the harvest of palm trees to retrieve the heart of palm, only 3% of the palm tree is used? That means 97% of the tree is waste. BioFink saw the waste dilemma and sought to

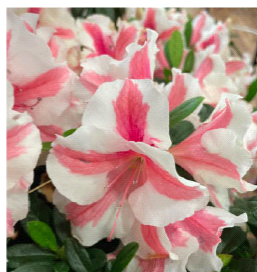
create a product with the unused palm fibers. They process the material and use a biodegradable product to "glue" the material together, creating the pot. These pots not only use waste materials, but are also biodegradable products themselves. Plant roots readily grow into the container's walls and it's also a plantable pot that will eventually biodegrade in the ground. The Xaxim Pots (pronounced "za-zeem") won TPIE's Favorite New Product Award.

Retail Hot Plants

The retailers who voted on this year's Cool Products Award for The Garden Center Group singled out a couple of plants that caught their eye via foliage, color or general "wow" factor. Here are a few.

Mad About Mangave Mission to Mars from Florida Tropiculture. Mangaves—the intergeneric cross between a Manfreda and an agave—are not “new” new, but new enough to still take one’s breath away when one spots a cool shape, color or form. Florida Tropiculture’s Mission to Mars specimen did just that for the Cool Product judges.

Alocasia curpea Red Secret from Northland Floral. This item has amazingly shiny leaves—and large, too, at a foot long on a plant that’s just 18-in. tall. And, most importantly, Northland has availability. (Is it me or does Red Secret look like the forehead of a Klingon?)



MANTS Hits for Retail

TPIE wasn’t the only show that took place in person this winter—MANTS in Baltimore was the first that happened live in early January. We had our Nursery & Landscape Insider editor Dr. Matthew Chappell on the ground looking for new products. Here’s what he found for retail. Thanks Matthew!

Azalea Autumn Starburst: Encore Azalea just keeps rolling out improved reblooming azaleas and Autumn Starburst was the best in show (that we saw, anyway). Hardy in Zones 6a to 10, the cultivar is on the small side at 3 ft. by 3.5 ft. with deep green foliage and a very good floral display. Flowers are bicolor with a complimentary coral pink edge with eggshell white. It’s a great contrast and a vibrant look from a distance. Definitely worth checking out if you’re looking for azaleas that fit in tight spaces.

Pop Star Hydrangea: One of the newest arrivals (in terms of cultivars) that was notable at MANTS was Pop Star Hydrangea. Pop Star is the latest introduction from the Endless Summer lineup from Bailey and lives up to the hype. Specifically, Pop Star offers a group of traits that as plant breeders would say are stacked, meaning a single cultivar has multiple positive traits. In the case of Pop Star, it’s compact (about 3-ft. rounded), it seriously reblooms the entire growing season starting about four to six weeks after the growing season initiates (or a tip pruning is performed), it’s Zone 4 (to 9) hardy, it doesn’t lodge due to stiff stems and short internodes, and it’s got great leaf spot tolerance. It also roots very well, and grows out quickly and uniformly. All in all, an excellent performer for the grower and in the landscape. **GP**