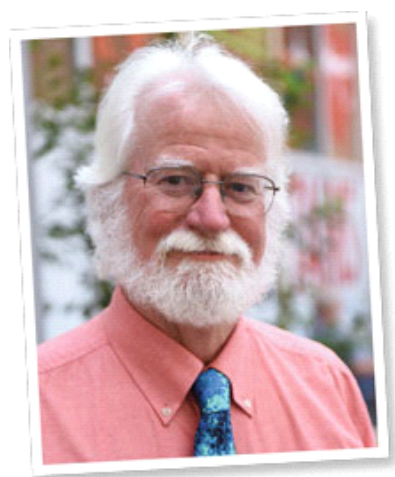


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As Summer Wanes: A Recap

John Friel



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Everyone else shares their tradeshow take-homes. Why not me?

Perennial Plant Association National Symposium

This year's symposium was, for the first time, in my bailiwick: Lancaster, Pennsylvania. We outdrew Chicago and Denver, and I think we surprised many folks with what a wonderful horticultural area this is.

It's always fun when good friends stop by to visit. When there are two or three busloads of 'em, well, the more the merrier. My employer's greenhouses and trial gardens were on the growers' tour and a good time was had by all despite the heat. Prominently on display and looking wonderful was next year's Perennial Plant of the Year: *Rudbeckia American Gold Rush*.

Speaker Bob Blew of Centerton Nursery fingered a trend: "Narrow and upright" is hot, even for—or perhaps especially for—smaller gardens.

Judging by many of the plants shown in the always-popular "New To The Market" session, he's got a point. Various presenters wowed the crowd with delphinium, digitalis, kniphofia, perovskia, sorghastrum and veronicastrum—all vertical elements.

Cultivate'22

You know how your awareness of something becomes keener when you have reason to be aware of that thing? You buy a new car, and suddenly, consciousness raised, you see that model everywhere you go? Or you get interested in, say, birds, and no matter where you're going, if you realize there are no binoculars in your car, you go back for them?

As a college student, I knew in an abstract way that every house had a TV antenna. Yes, I'm that old. Then I got a job installing them—in a harsh Pennsylvania winter, over Christmas break. Not a fond memory; my fingers still ache when it surfaces. Point is, suddenly I couldn't NOT see them, everywhere.

At Cultivate'22, the thing that stood out was much more pleasant: ornamental grasses. My employer grows millions of them, so my consciousness is permanently elevated. But this year, no matter who you are, you almost couldn't NOT see them—in the New Varieties Zone, in booths, even in concourse decorations. Grasses have long since arrived. The aforementioned tall/narrow/upright theme was on display in the aforementioned New Varieties Zone,

with a towering panicum appropriately named Totem Pole.

Fads become trends become niches become staples. Succulents and edibles were everywhere, still. Talk of supply chain woes and workforce challenges was inescapable. Booths showing off new labor-saving, or rather labor-replacing, machines drew steady traffic.

Day Three of a three-day show is always quiet. This year it almost felt like Day Three of a two-day show. At lesser conferences, exhibitors joke about archery tournaments in the aisles, since there's nobody there to hit. I never heard those gags in Columbus until this year. But with the European contingent back in the saddle, the whole event was better and livelier than last year's. Cultivate'23 should put those punch lines back in the quiver.

Cultivate'22 was probably my last Columbus rodeo. It's been a good long ride, setting up, working a booth, tearing down and many years of enjoying Ohio's largest metro area's many attractions: Great restaurants, from darts bars to fine dining; good AAA minor-league baseball; networking, greeting old friends and making new ones; cool public spaces; and so on. Cultivate rocks. Even the housing system, always an Achilles heel, while still funky, has improved.

Remember my question at the beginning, about sharing? I've tried hard NOT to share my most memorable take-home from Cultivate: A case of COVID, an unwelcome Columbus souvenir. Symptoms kicked in three days after I returned, with a positive test on the fourth and misery for a week.

I personally know five attendees who came home with the same unwanted tchotchke. All during PPA week I heard about others from several states.

It'd be interesting to know how many there are. A super trade show shouldn't have to also be a super-spreader event. I doubt anyone can produce that stat, but if I know five sick folks, lots of other attendees know at least one.

And this just in: While keying in this deathless prose, I heard that "a small handful" of PPA attendees have tested positive. Please be careful out there, gang. **GP**

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