

GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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The Big Questions

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I've always been an avid reader (how else would I get my colorful vocabulary?), and for the past couple of years, I've been reading two books at once—one fiction and the other non-fiction. It works because the non-fiction one you can put down for a while and pick up where you left off without feeling completely lost.

My current non-fiction book is "Leonardo da Vinci" by Walter Isaacson. I read Professor Isaacson's (he teaches history at Tulane University) book about Steve Jobs and loved it, so I put all of his historical biographies on my Amazon wish list.

I've always known that Leonardo was the OG "Renaissance Man," but I never knew how much of a great thinker he was. As Mr. Isaacson wrote, Leonardo's curiosity "was insatiable." The starting point for his book wasn't on Leonardo's great masterpieces (although he does dedicate whole chapters to "The Last Supper" and the "Mona Lisa"), but on the

numerous notebooks that reveal more than 7,200 pages of his miscellaneous notes, scribbles and ideas.

It was on these pages where we learn he wasn't just a gifted painter, but also a scientist, a mathematician, an engineer and even a stage set designer. You could also read in his left-handed slanting mirror script the big questions and ideas he wanted to investigate: "Observe the goose's foot," "Why is the fish in the water swifter than the bird in the air?" and, my favorite, "Describe the tongue of the woodpecker." Who even thinks about stuff like that?

I'm a nosy body by nature, so I can appreciate the need to ask a lot of questions. And when it comes to trying something new, it's usually because of a recommendation from someone else. But you know you have to test it yourself before you're convinced how fabulous (or not fabulous) the new thing is.

In our world, we do that through growing trials. Oh, sure, you listen to the breeders when they tell you how great a new variety is, but you want to try it out for yourself before you truly buy in and start growing a ton of it.

For example, the new Impatiens Downy Mildew-resistant series, Beacon and Imara XDR: the breeders have touted their resistance—and we know they've done their own very extensive trials—but you also like a second opinion sometimes. The summer university and grower trials are the perfect place for that. I asked trials managers in different parts of the country (and three from outside of the U.S.) to give me the data on how Beacon and Imara

performed in their trials this summer.

A group of nursery growers also had questions about how some of the new perennials and woody ornamentals would grow in their areas, so they took it upon themselves to create a trials program of their own, where they would collect the data, house it in one database and share it with each other. Good friend of GrowerTalks Paul Westervelt shared some of Saunders Brothers' favorites from their trials.

And in case you had some big questions on how to grow the newest varieties, how well your growing substrate absorbs water and how the cut flower segment of our industry is faring, we have those answers for you, too.

Art historian Kenneth Clark called Leonardo "the most relentlessly curious man in history" and Walter Isaacson said the artist wanted to know things because he was "curious, passionate and always filled with wonder." May we all be blessed with that desire to know more and the drive to keep trying new things for ourselves. **GT**