

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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HI Hydrangea URCs Now Available Through Express Seed

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Potted plant grower Creekside Greenhouse, based in Ontario, Canada, recently announced a partnership to develop new varieties and sell unrooted cuttings of the HI Hydrangea line through Express Seed. Produced through European breeding companies HIBreeding and Perlanova, HI Hydrangeas will now be part of Express' InBlume indoor floral program.

Pictured: Hydrangea HI Fire & Hydrangea HI River

Creekside has been producing dormant hydrangeas for Perlanova, HI and other breeders for the North American market for a number of years. During the last few years, URCs of HI Hydrangeas have been available from Creekside through Syngenta. Since Ontario provides an ideal climate for stock production of hydrangeas, Creekside can provide them as URCs, which will now be sold exclusively through Express.

The exclusive access to the HI Hydrangea program may be new to Express, but working with Creekside isn't anything new for either business.

"Creekside was a strategic supplier for us and did a great job in hydrangeas," explained Rebecca Siemonsma, Director of the InBlume program. "We had also invested a lot in selling hydrangeas and had a great relationship with that team. So, when they were looking for a new strategic partner in the U.S., it made perfect sense."

"We were already selling 90% to 95% of the dormants coming out of Creekside," said Scott Valentine, CEO for Express. "We knew the dynamics in the marketplace, so it was just a natural fit to evolve the partnership."

Although the HI Hydrangea line is primarily made up of potted varieties, the goal is to expand the breeding program to not only include the indoor flowering plants market, but also outdoor patio, landscape and cut flower markets, as well.

"All four partners are now going to work together on innovating in the category and targeting those segments," said Scott Rusch, Business Development Director for Express. "And then as Express with our InBlume and InFlora initiatives, vetting these varieties and recommending the best hydrangea for each one of those customer groups."

Express is hoping that with the partnership with the two breeders and the main supplier, they can grow the category. Potted hydrangeas have always been considered gift plants for Easter and Mother's Day. Rebecca said that HI and Perlanova have been working on earlier-flowering varieties that can be grown for Valentine's Day, and even Christmas. They're not thinking of pushing potted hydrangeas for year-round production, but definitely expanding the selling window and garnering more interest as new colors are introduced.

"Especially in cut flowers, the novelty types are important," Rebecca said. "People are looking for more than the old standard blue and pink varieties; they want something unique and different. Just like they do in all segments of our industry." **GT**