

# GROWERTALKS

## Web Exclusive

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## Acres Online

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Based on some conversations with growers and retailers last week, over the weekend and this week, spring is looking pretty positive across much of the country. Renowned Canadian retailer Brian Minter says things got off to a slow start, but the past weekend bodes well for a killer season, providing the weather holds. Gary Mangum of Bell Nursery in Maryland tells me he's had serious record-breaking sales thus far--and that's under pay-by-scan to Depot. And when I was at Berns Garden Center down near Cincinnati over the weekend, I was told their 50th Anniversary celebration on Saturday resulted in Mother's Day-like sales figures.

## Garden show tidbits

I was in Cinci with my wife and another gardening couple for the city's 17th annual flower show, and overall we weren't disappointed. The weather was perfect for opening day, which was good because one of the show organizers told me that lousy weather the year before had really put the show on the ropes.

We didn't know what to expect, and frankly, we were taken aback by the large numbers of vendors (birdhouses, ornamental metal, pressed flowers, t-shirts, ceramic mushrooms, etc.) and the relatively small number of garden displays. But according to the show program, that was a criticism they'd heard before, so they rearranged the venue to make the garden displays more prominent.

On reflection, I felt bad for being critical. The ample crowd seemed to be having a great day out in the early spring sunshine, whether they were gazing at prize-winning 5 lb. onions (courtesy of 10-time Chelsea Flower Show Gold Medal winner Medwyn Williams, pictured), drinking cold beer in the beer garden, or buying forged shepherd's crooks. (We certainly did our share of shopping.) It's what an event like this is all about.

However, it did bother me that, of the 112 vendors listed in the program, only 15 were plant sellers. Such a missed opportunity! Which leads to a good question: How many of you participate in city garden shows such as this? Is it worthwhile? Click [HERE](#) to reply.

[Derrick, insert garden show.jpg and medwyn.jpg here]

## Some more to take home

While enjoying a beverage in the aforementioned beer garden, I mentioned that I'd like to see more real-world idea displays; for instance, a row of mailboxes each planted in a different style. Well, darned if we didn't find just such an idea: a Window Box competition, wisely sponsored by Pella Windows. It consisted of numerous four-sided house facades where contestants displayed a window box and a matching hanging basket. It would be easy to build such a display at your garden center where you could display seasonal container ideas or host your own contest. At Pack Trials, Goldsmith had a similar display, in this case three-sided with decorated front entrance doors.)

[window boxes.jpg here]

Garden shows such as this are a great opportunity for growers and retailers to meet and talk with potential customers, get their name out and support their community. Bob Maddux of Delhi Flower & Garden Center is actively involved as Chairman of the show board. We ran into Mike Benken of H.J. Benken Florist & Greenhouse (his wife, Kathy, is a past-president of OFA). And we saw Benken's name and plants, along with Berns', Delhi's and Kruger-Maddux Greenhouse's, prominently displayed.

## A bit more on Chicago's show

As mentioned last time, Chicago garden centers and landscapers get a new promotional opportunity with the inaugural "Garden in a City" event slated for May 13-21 in Grant Park.

I took the commuter train downtown last week for a press conference featuring Mayor Daly (pictured), who's a strong supporter of this new show, which is designed to be more real world than the fantasy landscapes shown at other flower shows. According to Landscape architect Doug Hoerr (designer of Chicago's downtown plantings, along with Ball Horticulture's centennial garden redesign), this show will be chock full of balcony garden, patio, deck, rooftop garden and container vignettes and displays designed to inspire people to get out and garden. And it's being held at a time of year when they can do just that! Sister publication *Green Profit* will be involved, to figure out what inspired today's consumers.

[Derrick, mayor daily.jpg here]

## Travel

I'm not the only one on the road, although my fellow editors have slightly more glamorous itineraries: Jennifer White just returned from the South American country of Ecuador, where she was visiting rose growers and other points of interest. Jen says she was impressed with efforts being made by rose producers to care for their workers and their children while staying competitive with neighboring Colombia. She visited one grower, Sierra Flor, that she says has an amazing program set up for schooling the children of their workers. In fact, Jen says it made such a last impression on her, she wants to go back to volunteer. Watch for a feature story on Ecuador in an upcoming issue of *GrowerTalks*.

Meanwhile, fellow editor Bill "Buzz" Calkins is gallivanting around Holland as a guest of the Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions. On Tuesday, for instance, he was on a bicycling tour to the world-famous Keukenhof bulb garden.

My staff has it rough, don't they? Then again, I got to visit world-famous Jungle Jim's International Market in Fairfield, Ohio. They have 1,600 cheeses from 40 countries!

## Money for college

Looking for a way to help get junior (or juniorette) through horticulture school? How about one of the many scholarships offered by FIRST (Floriculture Industry Research and Scholarship Trust)? The application deadline for this year's scholarships is May 1. Go to [www.firstinloriculture.org](http://www.firstinloriculture.org) for online applications.

Speaking of young growers, we're in the process of narrowing down our Young Grower Award nominees; the five finalists will have guest editorials in the June issue. The topic we've given them will revolve around their vision of the future of the industry and how they'll position their companies to be successful. It should be a fascinating read!

Thanks again to our sponsors, OFA and Ball Horticulture.

## Finally ...

When I was at Berns on Sunday, I saw a customer who was absolutely atypical. He was a giant of a man, a union ironworker (according to the bumper stickers on his pickup truck), with tattoos on the back of his shaved head, and he was quietly contemplating the beauty of several blooming azalea plants. I so wanted to take his picture to illustrate the point that it's not just 45-year-old, educated, affluent white women who shop for our products. But I chickened out and didn't ask him to model for me. I was afraid he'd shove my camera up my nose. Silly of me, I know, and now I regret that I didn't stop and talk with him. I'm sure he was a great guy. I could have shared a few gardening stories AND picked up some welding pointers.

See you next time,

Chris