

## Acres Online - From Taiwan



*Weekly news and commentary from GrowerTalks magazine.*

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Welcome!

So, what's Taiwan like?

That's what this week's *Acres Online* is all about. Since it's not a country most of you will visit in your lifetime (and I wouldn't get to either, if it weren't for *GrowerTalks*), my task is to give you a taste of the country, of its industry and of the 2007 Taipei International Flower Exhibition, so you'll know what, if anything, you're missing.

First, where is the world of Taiwan? It's off the coast of

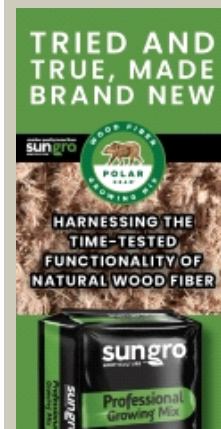
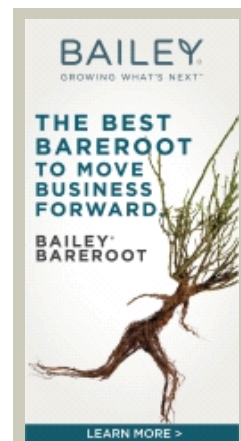


China, south of Japan and north of the Philippines, a leaf-shaped island, big, 13,852 sq. miles, about the area of Maryland. You ever heard of Formosa? Well, that's Taiwan's old name, before China got it back from Japan after World War II. It's officially called the ROC, or Republic of China), and it's a pretty democratic place, judging from the number of high-fashion stores and iPod-wearing kids in the city. Of course, I'm only seeing the fancy side of town; I'm sure there's some poverty to go around.



Taipei, the major city on the north end of the island, is home to the world's second-tallest building, the 101. It's shaped like a giant pagoda, and would be beautiful ... if I could see it all. You see, it's been so misty and rainy, the top is generally in the clouds. But it makes the Sears Tower look pretty square and boring by comparison. (As for the Statue of Liberty? It's in front of a shopping mall called "New York, New York.")

Scooters: everybody's got one. There are millions of the things buzzing around. Amazingly, they don't seem to be banging into each other or the city buses. One almost got me when I was stepping back to get a better angle for a photo, but I nimbly leapt out of the way.



Starbucks: on every corner. It's like being in Seattle, without the grunge music. Same with 7-Elevens—I've seen more here in the past two days than in the states in the past year. Although they don't carry quite the same fare ... I don't suspect this sign is promoting a new fish-on-a-stick Slurpee.

The people: wonderfully courteous and friendly. On escalators, they stand dutifully to the right so those in a hurry can pass on the left. In the subway stations, they stand to the side, in line, to allow passengers to depart. And they all try to speak a bit of English.



The amenities: modern. Like I said, I'm in the big city, so I don't expect squalor or substandard living conditions. But Taipei is as modern as New York or Chicago ... maybe more so, when you consider how new much of the construction is. The subway system (Metro), signed in Mandarin and English, is clean and fast. An all-day ticket is 200 Taiwan dollars (about \$3.50). I didn't get lost once.

## On to the show

My hosts for this adventure is **TAITRA**—the Taiwan External Trade Development Council. It's a non-profit agency supported by the government and industry that's charged with boosting Taiwan's exports by helping local companies do business overseas, and convincing overseas' companies to buy their stuff here. Agriculture is part of that. That's why TAITRA invited three journalists to visit the flower show: myself, representing *GrowerTalks* and *FloraCulture International*; Uko Reinders from *FlowerTech* in Holland; and Asada Takashi from *Kaki-Engei*, a Japanese weekly flower newspaper. They also invited five buyers from different countries, including Hong Kong and Dubai.





First, we hit the opening ceremony. "Ceremony" is the operative word, with loud music and dancers, and dozens of TV cameras. (Inexplicably, the dancers were doing a flamenco.) Then the president of the country arrived, and the vice president. Yep, the actual president. That's like George Bush showing up at OFA. Secret Service (or whatever they call guys with earpieces here) were all over the place. We had to go through a metal detector to get in.



At the ceremony itself, you could see more than a dozen tough-looking guys who were scanning the crowd while he was speaking. One guard had his hand stuffed in the end of his attaché case, like he was ready to pull out a machine gun if I tried anything. For once I was on my best behavior.

The president made the usual remarks, seven dignitaries donned white gloves and gold (I assume) scissors to cut

seven ribbons, and then we finally got to see the show.

And what a show! The first thing you see is a massive display of phalaenopsis orchids arranged in a waterfall. In another display, thousands of oncidiums are suspended in hundreds of bamboo stalks, like a forest of orchid trees.



The displays were truly over the top. But this was just sort of a display garden area, like you might see at a big orchid show open to the public. Another section of the show featured orchid and bonsai associations, as well as orchids entered into a quality contest. Again, more like you'd see at a public flower show. It was only when you got to the third section of the room that you found most of the industry booths: breeders, young plant suppliers, containers, media, finished plants and such. And even scattered here were the oddball booths selling miracle shears, pressed flower decorations, books, and even tea to "make you strong."

So as a show, it was a mixed bag. Beautiful, yes, with lots of impressive plants. But is it an industry event or a public flower show? I guess the answer is yes. It's not big, but seeing how it's been 10 years since the last one, and this is only the fourth total (the first was in 1993, followed by 1995 and 1997), they're still figuring out how to



grow the event. They certainly had some major players, including a Dutch pavilion and five Dutch growers, which



lent credibility to the event. The president assured the crowd that there would indeed be a 2008 show. And his agriculture secretary said the country's plan is to grow its floriculture exports from \$73 million last year to more than \$100 million by 2008.



Another favorite display was a bird crafted completely from cut mums.

## Finally ...

When it comes to food, so far, I haven't encountered anything too dangerous. There's scrambled eggs and bacon at breakfast, for Pete's sake! But at lunch today, I saw 100-year-old eggs. And not wanting to wimp out, I tried it. And you know what? It wasn't bad at all! In fact, if you closed your eyes, you wouldn't know it wasn't an ordinary 15 minute egg. But that's because, as it turns out, I think that's all it was, with something done to it



to make it dark in color.

Oh, and I skipped the jellyfish. So I'm still a wimp.

Thursday, it's bullet train and greenhouse day. I'll bring you more notes and pictures from that, and from the show.

Chris

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