

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Strong Showing for Horti Week

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Contrary to popular belief, Horti Fair isn't dead—although it has been looking a bit anemic.

Horti Fair, the combined exhibition of the International Flower Trade Show (flowers) and NTV (technology), held each fall in Amsterdam since 2000, has suffered in recent years, due, we're told, to high booth prices and an unresponsive management team, plus competition from other shows such as IPM Essen in Germany. From once filling all 11 halls of the 900,000 sq. ft. RAI exhibition center, it's down to a mere four halls, with "only" 599 exhibitors and 23,000 attendees, compared with nearly 1,000 exhibitors and 55,000 visitors in 2003.

At the same time, two other Dutch shows, the long-running Aalsmeer (now FloraHolland) Market and the new-last-year International Flower Trade Fair (IFTF), have been booming, leaving onlookers wondering how much longer Horti Fair might last.

But don't count Horti Fair out yet. We don't know about the stand prices, but Horti Fair's management team has been replaced, the dates have been pushed back to coincide with the other two events (for three years Horti Fair had moved up to the first week of October, which also hurt attendance), and the show is more focused on helping exhibitors and attendees reach each other—for instance, through complimentary shuttle service between the three shows.

The result was the most positive atmosphere in several years at Horti Fair, with more exhibitors (up 10%) and increased attendance (up 20%) over 2010—a noteworthy trend that bodes well for the show's survival.

GrowerTalks spent the first week of November in the Netherlands, visiting all three shows that make up Horti Week. Here are some highlights. (Mark your calendars for Horti Week 2012, October 30 to November 2, 2012.)

Horti Fair New Products

1. Light-diffusing paint for glass

Mardenkro won Horti Fair's top-prize Innovations Award for the new product RediFuse, a paint-on product

that diffuses the light coming into your glass greenhouse without reducing the light—important in light-starved areas such as northern Europe or northern U.S. Peter Heemskerk told us it's much less expensive than diffused glass (and less permanent, of course) and 100% biodegradable. Veggie growers have reported 4% to 10% increases in yield. www.mardenkro.nl

2. Florinilla Bella

This new variety of medinilla from Corn. Bak won Horti Fair's Innovation Award for new plants.

3. A small case of hives

Greenhouse vegetables need pollination, and Koppert (www.koppert.com) provides beehives for that purpose. Now they have a smaller one for smaller greenhouses. Called Minipol, this cardboard hive is designed for vegetable and soft fruit production in areas up to 7,500 sq. ft. It has a useable lifespan of four to seven weeks. Also, a new biological control from Koppert is *Amblydromalus limonicus*, a new predatory mite. Koppert says *A. limonicus* is the only predatory mite that eats larger thrips larvae (phases L1 and L2) and eggs, as well as all larval stages of whitefly. It has a big appetite and an outstanding reproductive capacity, and is active across a broad temperature range, from 55F to 86F (13C to 30C). www.koppert.com

4. “Dry” hydroponics?

Dry Hydroponics is a floating lettuce system that utilizes unique trays that keep part of the plant's roots out of the water. They say it helps prevent diseases, improve oxygen and nitrogen use, and increase water uptake. They also use trays with various plant spacing to maximize space use. Spacing can be done by hand on small systems or with automation on big setups. A 5,000 sq. ft. system costs about \$40,000. They say 1 acre of this production can output the same as 8 acres of standard lettuce production. www.cultivationsystems.nl

5. Orchid transplanting machine

With orchids the No. 1 potted plant now in Europe and the U.S., it's not surprising somebody's trying to automate the planting process. Javo is the first, with the latest iteration of their Directomatic orchid-planting machine. It's a carousel pot dispenser/filler combined with unique semi-automatic planting guides. Workers hang an orchid plant in each guide, and the machine automatically positions each plant in a pot and holds it in place while bark is automatically filled in around it. Javo says growers would usually have four or five people on one machine, doing about 450 plants/hour each. With the transplanter, two or three people can do 1,800 to 2,000 plants/hour. www.javo.eu

6. Solar insect control

A clever idea from AgriSolar Solutions in London: a solar-powered bug catcher. Invented by a Chinese scientist, it uses a special four-spectrum light bulb that attracts a wide variety of flying insects. A solar panel charges a battery, which powers the light. Bugs are attracted to it, get disoriented, and fall into the waiting bucket of water. Works at night to catch almost any sort of flying insect. The large field model (photo below, far right) will cover about 5 acres. There's also a small unit (in Sheila and Bob McGuire's hands) that's said to work in a greenhouse and costs less than \$400. www.agrisolarsolutions.co.uk

7. Precision vent/curtain positioning

Ridder, which makes drive mechanisms for vent and curtain systems, has designed a new positioning unit that gives ultra-precise positioning of your vents or curtain systems as they open or close. The all-electronic

unit replaces the standard potentiometer in new Ridder motors (and retrofits into your existing Ridder motors), providing 20,000 pulses, which is good for 1/16-in. increments of vent or curtain movement. www.ridder.com

8. Flower sorter makes mixed bouquets

Bercomex's new Furora flower sorter can use any sort of high-tech vision grading system, from video cameras to x-rays (which Bercomex uses for cut tulips to determine stem length within the bulb) to analyze virtually any cut flower. In addition, it will combine different types or colors of flowers to automatically make mixed bouquets. A sleeving unit completes the operation. We were told Washington Bulb Company in Washington is getting one. Check out our video at tinyurl.com/bercomex-furora. www.bercomex.com

9. Nero

One of five new anthuriums from Anthura, Nero is a striking black/red cut variety. www.anthura.nl

10. Bolt-together Dutch benches

Dutch container benches are generally welded together on-site, making them easy to ship in pieces but expensive and time-consuming to assemble (and welding the aluminum is a bit of an art form). Two companies have introduced bolt-together container benches that don't require any welding. WPS Horti Systems introduces HortiKit. The extrusions are from Alcomij. And KG Systems' bench is called Easy-Fix bench. Both are slightly more expensive for the kit, but you save money on assembly labor, making the total cost lower than then cost for a welded bench. www.wpshortisystems.nl, www.kgsystems.nl

11. Practically Perfect Plants

At least half of the only flower hall at Horti Fair was occupied by the Interpolis House of Quality, a competition among growers to see who has grown the highest-quality cut flowers, potted plants and foliage. Expert judges rate the plants against known standards, giving a score up to 10.00. To give you an idea of what an almost-perfect plant looks like, here's the top scoring cyclamen, which rated 9.60 in the judges' eyes.



FloraHolland Trade Fair

Possibly the most popular show for most North American visitors, FloraHolland's Trade Fair is for local growers to exhibit finished product to exporters and retailers. We like it because it's a great place to find plant and packaging inspiration. For instance, Washington state grower Terry Smith of Smith Gardens found perennials labeled "winter hardy," a term much more consumer-friendly than perennial. He planned to use it in his own plant labeling.

FloraHolland is also growing, expanding further into the parking garage of the FloraHolland auction building in Aalsmeer. They say there were 10,000 visitors and 650 exhibiting growers on 180,000 sq. ft. of space.

12. What trends did we spot? Dyed and glittered plants continue to be popular, as well as controversial. They were everywhere, in every color. Why? Because they sell. Paul Splinter from EuroCactus (pictured) said

70% of his production during the holidays is colored. The rest of the year it's still 30%.

13. Blue flowers seem to be the Holy Grail. While Suntory continues to try to breed a true blue rose in Japan, others are resorting to secret dye techniques, first on orchids and now on anthurium and kalanchoe. We were told (but were unable to confirm) that both plants are created using the same technique as the Blue Mystique orchids, licensing the technology from the developer, VG Orchids. The blue anthurium pictured is called Princess Alexia Blue and is from RijnPlant. They also offer a yellow one called Princess Alexia Yellow. The Kalanchoe, called Mystic Blue, is from KP Holland.

14. The most interesting find: "Hello Kitty." You probably know the ubiquitous cat that's on every consumer product of interest to young girls (and older ones, too, we hear). A French company, Clayrton's, has licensed Hello Kitty and has sublicensed the brand to 10 Dutch growers who've come up with a line of Hello Kitty plant products. They're mostly small bags with the Hello Kitty logo and a flower or plant in it. Simple stuff. But think of the appeal to children! The brand is available in North America, if you're interested. Unless one of the U.S. growers in attendance has beaten you to it.

International Floral Trade Fair

Our first visit to this two-year-old event impressed us. It's not a big show—yet. Organizers (HPP International) say the visitor count was 11,800 to see some 200 stands. Exhibitors included pretty much all the big flower breeders who used to exhibit at Horti Fair, such as Bartel Roses, Florist, Konst Alstroemeria, Meilland, Morel, RijnPlant, Rosen Tantau, Danziger and Preesman. There were also some hardgoods companies exhibiting. The exhibitors filled the three halls (which felt like one large one) of Expo Haarlemmermeer, the former home of the 2002 Floriade.

A couple new introductions we spotted:

15. Euphorbia Princettia Max-White, from Suntory, exhibited by Moerheim New Plant, is the fifth color in this series of euphorbia (poinsettia) that Suntory is pushing for spring and summer sales. It's got small pure white bracts with plenty of bright green foliage showing through.

16. Rose Deep Purple by Olij Breeding. They say lavenders and purples are hot right now, and this one fits the bill with its intense purple outer petals and contrasting lighter inner petals. Thornless, with long stems. **GT**