

GROWERTALKS

Features

8/30/2016

Found in the Aisles

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Change and cautious optimism seemed to be the theme of this year's Cultivate show. As always, there was still a lot to see behind the partition walls that were hiding the dust from all of the construction (the convention center is being expanded) and it will be interesting to see how it will look after it's completed. It didn't seem to hurt the event, though.

As for the mood of the attendees, most folks had a very good spring. They have money to invest, but they're not blowing it on a new boat; instead they're looking for production efficiencies for the long haul.

One thing we did hear a bit of grumbling about was the proposed changes to next year's show, which includes a new floor layout and, supposedly, a booth price increase. Exhibitors don't tend to like change unless it's to a better location by an entrance, but there are only a few of those to go around. So be prepared for a completely new look at Cultivate'17.



A growing media breakthrough

If you've been in this industry for a while, you know about Dr. Jim Boodley and Dr. Ray Sheldrake's research on growing media and their development of the Cornell soilless media mix. That was in the early 1980s, and besides some research on soil pH and EC and new amendments that have been introduced, there hasn't been much in the way of new media additives since then.

But now Oldcastle, in partnership with Ball Seed, has introduced a new product called HydraFiber. Manufactured in North Carolina, HydraFiber is reclaimed wood from the timber industry that's ground down into fibers. Instead of using coconut coir or peat—which is at risk of running out—this is a good alternative.

They believe that this will reduce costs for growers in a number of ways: HydraFiber is a lot lighter, so there are less freight costs. Plus, it distributes moisture better. Peat moss tends to have a waxy covering, so many growers find themselves having to use a wetting agent, and coir uses too much water, so the plant has to work harder to take the moisture from the soil. And HydraFiber is less expensive overall than peat.

Oldcastle is the exclusive distributor of HydraFiber blended with the Ball Professional Mix. They have a

standard mix and can also custom make one as well.

And although it's made from wood, they're trying to stay away from the word "wood" because people tend to think of "bark," which HydraFiber definitely is not. They're conducting trials with growers around the country and with researchers at North Carolina State University and Auburn University. We'll be publishing some of that research in future issues of *GrowerTalks*, so stay tuned.

For information on blends, contact Scott Wiltsey at Oldcastle at Scott.Wiltsey@oldcastle.com. For info on raw material, call Jennifer Neujahr at (630) 386-5926.



The new royalty?

Move over froschkönigs—we found something else in Proven Winners' booth that's now wearing the crown: dogs!

Using spidey sense

Vestaron Corporation has introduced a new bioinsecticide with synthetically based ingredients derived from the venom of the Blue Mountain Spider, which is found in New South Wales, Australia, and the third most venomous spider in the world. It's a new approach to biopesticides and they say they're the only ones using this type of

technology.

The thinking is since spiders use their venom to kill their prey, which includes other insects, then the molecular makeup of that venom can be used to kill greenhouse pests. The first formulation is called Spear-T, which is for thrips control and is about 95% to 100% effective to kill all of the life stages except the eggs.

One of the primary benefits of Spear-T is that it's different from other biopesticides in that there's nothing live in the formulation, so it has a longer shelf life. There are two modes of action, so there's no chance for resistance and there are no residue issues. It's also safe to use with other live beneficials, like green lacewings, parasitic wasps, whitefly parasites and ladybugs. It's in powder form right now, but there's a liquid one coming out soon.

Other products coming soon are Spear-P—that targets Colorado Potato Beetles—and Spear-C—that controls caterpillars. www.vestaron.com



Landmark Plastic

Landmark had lots of new products to show this year and there were two that caught our eye.

The first was their new indoor gardening packaging line. (It was easy to spot because of the bright green color.) The collection includes heavy duty trays and

a 10-pack of 4-in. pots that consumers can buy and use at home for herbs or to start seedlings. But the coolest thing was the clamshell pack.

Available as a single or in a 3-pack, it securely holds a 3-in. pot in place so that the plant doesn't get knocked

around during shipping. Landmark is currently developing a box for the clam packs that fits UPS and FedEx standards.

The other cool product was what they call the accordion tray. Developed with Timbuk Farms in Granville, Ohio, it's a 51-count plug holder that's already spaced out so you don't need a tray. It folds up and snaps together so growers don't have to ask their employees to manually space them out. Plus, you can make it a 102 tray when it's folded up with "walls" between the rows to protect the plants. And the tray was designed with a slant on either side so that the water funnels toward the plug. The patent is pending.

www.landmarkplastic.com



Pride Garden Products

Aren't these beautiful wooden bowls? They're beautiful, alright, but not wooden. They're strictly cement. The bowls look just like wood, but are more durable and much less expensive than actual wood. Pride Garden Products said these faux wood bowls have been popular with growers, as they're appropriate for trendy succulents.

Water Pulse

WaterPulse's National Sales Manager Scott Kegerreis showed off a new product designed to reduce water usage while providing a key convenience factor for growers and retailers. It's a spring-loaded mechanism that stops the flow of drip irrigation water when a customer or a grower removes a hanging basket. Once the basket gets re-hung on the mount, the water starts flowing again. The flow of water is shut off to that basket only, so the rest continue to get watered. It's called the Hanging Basket Watering System and a patent is pending.

Eckert's Greenhouse

Greenhouses and retailers that provide hanging baskets for municipalities have a new option that can allow them to water less and change out baskets seasonally. The 28-in. Wrap Around from Eckert's Greenhouse in Sterling Heights, Michigan, consists of an outer container that secures to the pole and liner inserts that can be dropped into the container. That way, the grower/retailer can grow the plants right in the inserts and then drop them in when they're ready. The container features a 2.2-gal. water reservoir to cut down on watering. Eckert's also sells decorative black cages that can go around the container for a more sophisticated look. The inserts are designed in two halves to wrap around the pole and fit poles that are 3.5 in. to 8 in. in diameter. The removable liner insert is made of 0.150 in.-thick polypropylene and are 9 in. deep. More information can be found at www.h2olaborsaver.com.

Homegrown Gourmet

The Homegrown Gourmet line of herbs and veggies is a brand created by Schmidt Bros., a greenhouse in Swanton, Ohio, and the line is expanding with more than 120 varieties, including heirloom and All-America Selections winners. In the booth, Bob Schmidt showcased a new series called Savory Ensembles that included three herbs and veggies in a trendy three-pot tray. The mixes can be themed and include tags that reference the website for growing tips and recipes. Schmidt Bros. also has a tomato chart and pepper chart

as additional point-of-purchase material that Bob says is very popular among garden centers and their customers. The tomato chart highlights the best uses for each type of tomato and the pepper chart details taste and heat based on the Scoville rating system.



Dramm Corp.

While congratulating Ron Greening from Dramm on the company's 75th anniversary (they don't look a day over 25), he explained how the company continues to innovate with new retail products like the ColorStorm 4-Pattern Gear Drive sprinkler.

This new sprinkler has, you guessed it, four patterns (flat, fan, mini and large), but what's really unique is the sled-style base. When hooked up to a hose, the homeowner can yank it by the hose through the yard without the sprinkler toppling over. So basically, you don't have to get wet to move the sprinkler anymore. It's available now and will be in the Dramm booth at all of the fall distributor shows.

Eco Personal Garden

Denise English realized a potential gap in miniature gardening products with regard to oversized, lightweight, durable and creative containers, so she collaborated with designers within the plastics industry to make some fun and fresh molds for gardening. The result is the Eco Personal Garden line, a group of products that are low-maintenance and lightweight. There are a handful of designs right now, including the Acorn (pictured here), a Walnut, one called Oasis (shipping soon) and a Broken Pot. They're ideal for miniature gardening, but can also be used for any type of gardening.



Because they're made of rotational molded plastic—the same process used to make outdoor mailboxes and large children's toys—the containers are durable, UV protected and can withstand heat and cold. Denise says to be on the lookout for a new "Cottage Series" of bright colors that will be introduced soon. Find out more at www.EcoPersonalGarden.com.



Very Cool Stuff

At the end of the first day of Cultivate'16, we asked a trade show attendee—a complete stranger—what if anything he'd seen that he really liked. "The American flag bucket from Very Cool Stuff," was his response without thinking twice. We'd spotted it, too! Our nation's flag is used in heavy rotation nowadays as a matter of pride and honor, so this bucket will surely slip into greenhouse production lines and onto retailers' shelves with ease. Pair it with an upright potted plant for the front stoop or fill it with ice and frosty beverages for that Independence Day cookout. Long may those colors wave.

Scroll Trellis

Larry McMurray and his wife Diane have developed a solution to the problem of vining plants cascading to nowhere or climbing awkwardly up a pot hanger. Larry, an engineer by trade, helped solve Diane's potted climbing vine problems and eventually invented Vining Tracks. It's a wire structure with sections of poly mesh attached to the supports. Insert two or more of the Vining Tracks into the planted basket or pot to create a

balloon-shaped structure, then train the vines up the supports. The vines will grow up and out, giving the basket a more lush and verdant look—and that'll get you more money and quicker sales at retail.



Sally's Garden Throws

Soon the nights will have a chill, then the snow will start to fall. Stock your retail store with warm, colorful throws from artist Sally Wiley Ayers. An amateur artist her whole life, Sally got down to the business of watercolors after retirement. Using Sally's art, all of Sally's Garden Throw products—including pillows and totes—are made by weavers in North and South Carolina. These pieces of art include butterflies, birds, flowers—even grape and wine themes. Stock up—winter is coming!

Lock Drives

We love simple solutions to complex problems. Such as, how can you replace worn or broken pinions on a rack & pinion drive shaft without having to dismantle the entire shaft? It's easy with Lock's new EZD 52, a two-piece pinion with a snap-on housing. You simply fit the locking pinion around the drive shaft, snap on the rugged plastic housing, then insert the rack and tighten the Allen bolts. EZD 52 accommodates any standard 30-mm rack. And Lock believes in their new plastic housing so much they're using it for their standard one-piece pinions, too.

McConkey

Plastics specialist McConkey has launched Bondshell, a new manufacturing technique that brings photorealism to pots. The technology, which comes from Europe where it's used widely in the food packaging market, utilizes a printed polypropylene image that's bonded at 500F, to become one with the pot. Crisp, clear and durable, Bondshell can be used for branding or for designs, such as the Nairobi basket pictured. Right now, McConkey offers two sizes of Bondshell: 12-in. baskets and 2-gal. planters. Price is perhaps 15% higher than standard pots; recycled plastic helps keep costs down.



Philips/Raker

LED lights were everywhere at Cultivate'16, but few companies have the depth and breadth of lighting research of Philips. This Dutch company has been a leader in the technology, and more and more growers are testing LEDs over and even amongst (such as interlighting of tomatoes and roses) their crops. One bit of research they showed off was "sole source-grown" bedding plant plugs. C. Raker & Sons in Michigan is experimenting with growing plugs using only LED lighting—no sunlight at all. Instead, they stack them in racks in a chamber. The Philips folks say the LED-grown plugs finish faster, have better roots (evident in the photo) and are more compact and well-branched. We'll definitely be following up with Raker on this technology to see if it's as good as Philips claims.

Ludvig Svensson

Svensson never seems content to introduce a shade or energy fabric and call it good enough. They're constantly improving their existing products. Such as New Harmony fabric, which has been engineered with new films that provide even better light diffusion than their classic Harmony fabric. In fact, it spreads the light so effectively, plants in shady areas of the greenhouse will receive 32% more light than before. You can see in

the photo that the bar on the right, under the New Harmony fabric, casts less of a shadow. New Harmony is available in both open and closed versions, depending upon whether you want to improve cooling or reduce heat loss.

Bouldin & Lawson

Our friend Paul Whiting from the big green machinery company revealed some interesting news: Bouldin & Lawson are getting back into the transplanter business! It's probably been a decade since they dropped out of that market, but lower-cost technology combined with customer demand have them launching a new generation PlugPlanter. Alas, it wasn't at the show, but Paul gave us the details: German servo motors move the grippers, the software is widely used off-the-shelf CNC machine software and the grippers are simple, with no moving parts. Capacity is 16, 24 or 32 grippers with speeds from 16,400 to 32,500 plugs per hour.

Agrinomix

A flying fork sounds like a food fight hazard, but actually it's a new way to move plants in and out of your greenhouse. Agrinomix's new Flying Fork IS a battery-powered overhead gantry system that one worker can operate. It'll pick up and move 880 lbs. of pots and trays in most any size (forks are changeable). Unlike a standard wheeled forklift system, the Flying Fork can carry plants over others in the growing area, giving you the ultimate in spacing and movement flexibility. One fork moves from bay to bay through the use of a rail-mounted transfer carriage. We posted a short video of it in action at tinyurl.com/flyingfork.

Emerald Coast Growers

The Florida grower is celebrating its 25th anniversary with several plant introductions. Our favorite new grass is *Miscanthus sinensis* Bandwidth (pictured), which features broad, bright gold bands that span rich green blades.

We also liked that ECG is on trend with their Chick Charms Collection of hardy succulents. Selected by breeder Chris Hansen, Chick Charms are offered in two different collections featuring unique colors and uniform habits.



Visser Horti Systems

Automation manufacturer Visser offers two new tools for the midsize or smaller grower. The first is an entry level transplanter called the Pic-O-Mat Blueline. With six to eight grippers, the Blueline will transplant up to 10,000 plugs per hour from any plug tray to any destination tray. Servo motors are fast and flexible, and a touch screen makes for easy operation, programming and changeovers. Cost is \$60,000 to \$70,000—quite reasonable for a high-tech transplanter.

Also at Visser is a new Mini Bale Breaker, designed to break up 3.8 cubic ft. bales of peat or mix. Watch it in action at tinyurl.com/minibalebreaker.



The Young Grower and Young Retailer Winners and Finalists

Drum roll, please ... The winner of the *GrowerTalks/Dümmen Orange* Young Grower Award, announced Monday night at Cultivate's annual Unplugged event, is Jane Stanley, IPM and Woody Grower at Saunders Brothers in Piney River, Virginia

And on the retail side, our *Green Profit/Dümmen Orange* Young Retailer Award goes to Will Heeman of Heeman's Garden Centre & Strawberry Farm in Thorndale, Ontario, Canada.

Both of these fine young people are featured on the covers of the September issue that you hold in your hand. Congrats! **GT**

Left to right: Jon Neff, YRA winner Will Heeman, James Doukas, Elizabeth Nevadomski and YGA winner Jane Stanley. Not pictured: Jason Blanchette