

Maria's Puerto Rican Legacy; Amazon's Biodomes; a New Houseplant Book



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Vista Farms survives Maria
Amazon's Spheres
LED webinar next Thursday
Dutch exports up 6%
Ball expands succulent program
Bailey rebrands, expands R&D
PW soil and fert easier to source
Pageant TR now available
Finally ...



One Puerto Rican grower's story



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PLANIPEDDLER

I only know one Puerto Rican grower: Jerome O'Neill of Vista Farms, who produces bougainvillea liners. Jerome has been exhibiting at the California Spring Trials for quite a few years; he always seems to come up with something new and interesting in this colorful tropical crop (for which I've always had a soft spot, as I used to grow hanging baskets of it back at my Florida greenhouse). Vista Farms is located in Juana Diaz, near the south-central coast of the country, close to the city of Ponce.

I was curious how Vista came through the hurricane, but couldn't find a way to reach them. Then I learned that Ball's Pat Senne is their product manager, and that Pat had received a brief email from Jerome. He wrote this to her:

"We are well under the circumstances. The nursery is damaged, but not significantly. The inventory is 80% good, so we hope to resume shipping as soon as the airlines resume cargo services." He added that they have no phone, Internet or email at the office, but he was able to communicate via email and text.



Jerome says he stripped the plastic off the houses before the storm hit to prevent the frames from being destroyed. Now they're in the process of recovering the houses.

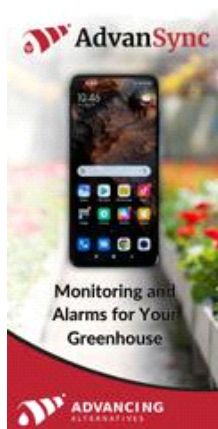
Pat communicated again with Jerome, asking if I could share his note, saying that it would rebuild confidence with customers and highlight the courage and resilience of Puerto Rico. Pat replied:

"Super!" Then he added, "We have a new white ixora which we were struggling to find a name for ... it will be called MARIA."

I laughed when I read that. Talk about resilience!

Glad to hear you're still in business, Jerome. If you need any help from the industry, let us know.

One way you, dear reader, might be able to help Jerome would be to order some Vista Farms bougainvillea liners ... and some Maria Ixora.



In fact, to build on that idea, why not grow some and tout that they'd actually survived Hurricane Maria! Every plant sells better when it's got a story. You could even donate a portion of sales to a hurricane recovery effort.

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Amazon's Spheres

This week I'm in Seattle doing some visits and one stop I had to make was to see Amazon's Spheres, part of their new downtown office complex. The Spheres are combination greenhouses/offices that will eventually house some 40,000 plants, many of them rare, and some of them very big.

I'd hoped to get an inside tour of the Spheres with Amazon's head horticulturist, Ron Gagliardo, but he was swamped with the beginning of move-in of many of the plants and just didn't have time. Still, I figured I could see the outside and take a few pictures.



Impressive! It's not as big as England's Eden Project, but it reminded me of that, with its interconnected dome-shaped greenhouses. One of the signs at the construction site read, "The Spheres are designed to be a place where Amazon employees can think and work differently. They are a result of innovative thinking about the character of the workplace and an extended conversation about what is typically missing from urban offices—a direct link to nature."

The shape is a "pentagonal hexecontahedron" (which you'd know, if you'd paid attention in geometry).

[HERE](#) is an article from *Wired* magazine giving a more detailed description of the project.

It's good to know that today's cutting-edge companies see the value of plants in the workplace.



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HAPPY TO PRESENT:



Maybe it will spread to the mainstream.

Getting started with LED lighting: A free webinar

I've been writing about LED lighting for more than a decade, yet most of you who light your crops haven't yet tested the technology. What are you waiting for? Based on what I've seen, the things work!

To give you the confidence to give LED lighting a try, I'm going to be hosting a webinar next week with my friend Dr. Abhay Thosar, Senior Plant Specialist with Philips Lighting. Abhay has conducted scores of LED trials in a wide range of greenhouses, and he knows all there is about how to set up a small-scale trial that will help you determine if LEDs can improve your crops.

In this webinar, Abhay will share stories about how other growers have initiated their first trial with LEDs and what they learned in the process. He'll cover:

- Importance of comparative lighting scenarios—how to track and measure
- How LED lighting may impact crop inputs and other operational factors
- Why LED lighting is not "one size fits all"
- Results from growers that have conducted trials under Philips LEDs

Mark your calendar for **Thursday, October 5**, at 1:00 p.m. Eastern/Noon Central. Click [HERE](#) to sign up.

Did I mention it's free? Actually, it's priceless!



Dutch plant and flower exports up 6%

It's always interesting to see how another part of the horticulture world is fairing and no part is bigger or more global than the Netherlands. A recent report from the VGB (the Dutch Association of Wholesalers in Floriculture Products) says that growth of Dutch plant and flower exports through August is up around 6% year over year, revealing good demand for our products. And showing that prices remain strong, the exports have a total value of 4.2 billion euros (\$\$\$). VGB

says this is the first time that export value has hit the 4 billion euro mark this early in the year.

Not that currency exchange rates haven't negatively impacted some countries. Exports to the USA, for example, were up 12% in 2016. For 2017, they're flat. And in the UK, a year after Brexit was announced, the export value has changed from flat in 2016 to -7% this year. The weaker value of the dollar against the euro has also had consequences for the international flows in the flower trade.

Exports to the emerging market of Russia have been very strong—up 38% so far this year, thanks to a stable ruble.

In flower trend news, cut flower sales have increased more than potted and garden plant sales, with cut exports up 7% and plant exports slightly behind at +4%.

How are sales in the U.S.? We have no way to know, thanks to the USDA discontinuing our annual Floriculture Crops Summary report due to budget challenges. : (



Ball Seed expands succulent program

The trend shows no sign of slowing, so it only makes sense that Ball Seed (for full disclosure, a sister company to Ball Publishing) should expand its offerings in this hot category. To that end, they're working with young plant partner Tagawa Greenhouses to offer a "fresh, new cutting-edge assortment ... specially chosen to cover a range of colors, forms and textures."

To make it easy to order, Ball Seed will let you create a customized succulent program with one of two mixed tray options: 50-count liner trays with a mix of either five or 10 varieties). The program will be available 52 weeks a year, with guaranteed truck shipping to the Midwest, Southeast and Southwest regions offered many weeks.

Contact your Ball Seed sales rep or Ball ColorLink associate for details, or order online [HERE](#).



Bailey rebrands and expands breeding division

Two pieces of news from Bailey Nurseries, the St. Paul, Minnesota-based woody plant specialist best known for Endless Summer Hydrangeas, Easy Elegance Roses and First Editions plants:

First, they've rebranded their Georgia-based Plant Introductions, Inc. (PII) division to "Bailey Innovations." Bailey acquired Plant Innovations in 2015. Said company president Terri McEnaney, "By renaming our product development arm, it puts a greater focus on one of our primary objectives: bringing the best woody ornamentals to market. We've worked very hard since purchasing PII to strengthen our offering of new shrubs through vigorous testing, creative breeding and tireless research to determine consumer demand."

Second, they're expanding the space that Bailey Innovations has to do its breeding and development work. They've purchased the Winterville, Georgia, location of Transplant Nursery,

which will serve as the new home of their breeding and trialing operations. Terri told me that the facility is larger than they currently need; in fact, they'll probably lease some space back to Transplant Nursery. However, they'll be able to use the extra space to do production, to aid in the ever-increasing demand for their young plants.

"This is a very exciting time for the Bailey Nurseries plant breeding team," says David Roberts, Breeder and General Manager of Bailey Innovations. "The acquisition of a permanent facility will not only allow us to expand upon our trialing program, but also grant us the opportunity to implement display gardens and increase the number of plant genera that we work with at Bailey Innovations."



PW soil and fert now easier to source

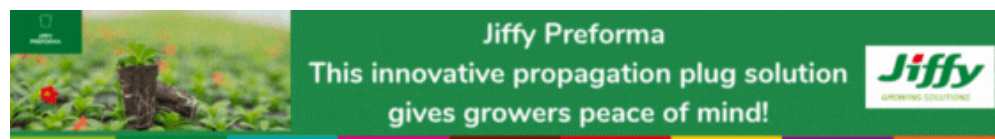
If, as a retailer, you've wanted to carry Proven Winners-branded potting soil and fertilizers, but have had a tough time getting them to your store, you can rejoice, as Proven Winners has added several new distributors to make getting the product easy and quick. They include Arett Sales, BFG Supply Company, Griffin Greenhouse Supplies and Foster's Inc. Four Star Greenhouse in Michigan and Pleasant View Gardens in New Hampshire will also continue to offer the products in their regions.

So what's the change? I learned that Sun Gro has always been the producer of the products, but after they dissolved their sales force, it became challenging to source them. Proven Winners' Dave Konsoer has been hard at work arranging a full stocking network of distributors. Says Dave, "This new arrangement is going to make it much easier for many of our customers to be able to source the items from stocking distributors they regularly order from."

Dave says that for retailers already selling Proven Winners plants, the branded hardgoods are a "slam dunk" add-on sales opportunity. And it's good for the end-consumer, he adds.

"[I]t accomplishes a huge goal of ours to make gardeners as successful as possible by giving them greater access to high-quality soil, high-quality plant foods and high-quality plants."

Proven Winners' soil will continue to be made in Sun Gro's plant in Quincy, Michigan, and the plant foods will be packaged in the Chicagoland area.



Pageant Total Release now available

Who doesn't love a total-release (TR) fungicide? They're the easiest way to do quick, easy disease control without mixing or having to fire up a sprayer. BASF has added to its line of total-release offerings by putting its Pageant Intrinsic fungicide in a TR formula. It's labeled for use on greenhouse ornamentals at any time during the production cycle. As a bonus, it's also labeled for use in the cargo area of trucks, so you can prevent botrytis, mildew and other diseases that can show up in dark, cramped, moist confines.

Pageant TR offers broad-spectrum foliar protection against seven foliar diseases: Alternaria, Botrytis, Cylindrocladium, Cercospora, Myrothecium, powdery mildew and rust (Uromyces).



Finally ...

More proof that houseplants are making a comeback (and that print isn't dead) is the release of a new book titled: "HOUSEPLANTS: The Complete Guide to Choosing, Growing and Caring for Indoor Plants."

At first I was dubious. There are already about a thousand houseplant books on the market; I know, because my wife owns two-thirds of them. But then I realized how dated they probably are. And this new one is authored by somebody who has a pretty serious pedigree as a houseplant geek: Lisa Eldred Steinkopf. Her resume includes:

- She's known as "The Houseplant Guru" and has a blog, thehouseplantguru.com
- She's written for HGTVgardens.com, *Real Simple* magazine, *Michigan Gardener Magazine* (where she has a monthly column) and the houseplant section of Allan Armitage's *Greatest Perennials* and *Annuals* app
- Best of all, she worked for more than a decade at Steinkopf Nursery as the *Annuals* and *Houseplants Manager* (she's one of us!)
- She practices what she preaches, having "well over 1,000 houseplants in her home" according to the book's press release



The book features more than 125 houseplants, with all the details needed to be successful with them.

"HOUSEPLANTS: The Complete Guide to Choosing, Growing and Caring for Indoor Plants" will be on sale November 7.



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Chris Beytes

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