The Last Acres Online of 2017



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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Amazon goes deeper into hort?
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River Ridge holday greens
- Which are most popular?
- Christmas vs. spring, fall
GT's most popular stories
Finally ...





I should make it a good one, eh?





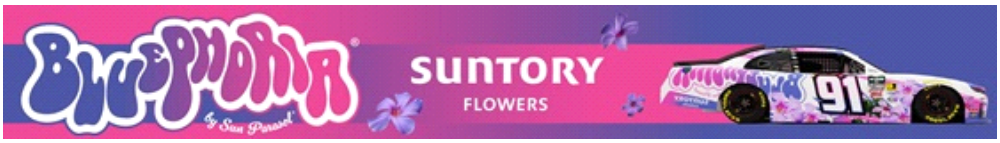




Seeing how this is the very last *Acres Online* of the year, the 48th send—no, wait, the 51st, when you count the three special River Ridge Reports—I should make this one extra good. Which would be easy if some major breeder would buy another major breeder, or some big grower would acquire another big grower, or perhaps one of the box stores would announce that they're doubling their L&G footprint, or a key online merchant would decide to build rooftop greenhouses on every one of their 140 fulfillment centers.

But, alas, Santa didn't leave any of those major news gems in my inbox.

Still, there's news if you know where to look. And I've always got views! Plus, as a perfect conclusion to an, er, interesting year, I will leave you with a feel-good video from Teleflora that shows how flowers can tear down walls.



Amazon goes deeper into plants?

One of my sharp-eyed readers (who happens to do business on Amazon), says that the online retailer has gone further into the plant business by launching the "Amazon Plants Store." I checked it out, and the homepage does use the word "Introducing," which implies that it's a new feature of the site.

It lists some brands and plant-buying tips sponsored by Proven Winners. And when I click on particular plants, such as liriope, I note that it's available as Amazon Prime, and that it's "shipped from and sold by Amazon.com." Does this mean Amazon is now warehousing plants? I doubt it, but you never know.

I've put out inquiries to a few Amazon-selling growers I know to see if I can learn anything more. If you've got inside info you can share, email me at beytes@growertalks.com.

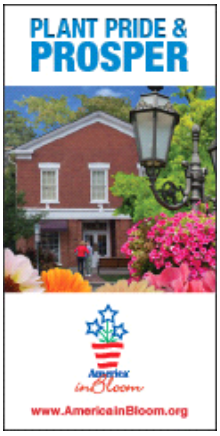
My view: Amazon sells everything else, so why not plants? I view them as just another box store, albeit a very large one. They certainly aren't going away, but at the same time, there's plenty of room for brick-and-mortar plant sellers. If the current crop of big boxes haven't put you under, Amazon won't, either.

Actually, the ones feeling the pressure should be anyone else looking to sell plants online. Amazon has raised the price, delivery time and service bar so high that I don't envy anyone trying to compete on their digital turf!









Speaking of Amazon: They've patent a garden service

Sustainability editor Jennifer White reported this in her most recent *GreenTalks* newsletter:

What will Amazon do next? According to the patent office, they're looking to match their customers' gardens with the products they might most need. Amazon recently received a patent for a "garden service" that relies on algorithms and image recognition software to make recommendations.

How will it work? It seems that you'd take a picture of the plants in your yard and the service would identify the plants, recommend recipes, related gardening items to order and maybe some groceries. But it will also analyze the growing area—and recommend plants that will do well under those conditions. All of which you would purchase online (obviously, from Amazon).

To quote from the patent application and their example: "The garden service may also determine from the images that a large brick pizza oven structure may shade the south-end of the backyard. As such, the garden service may recommend a wild ginger plant, also available at the electronic marketplace, as a low-shade plant that can be grown in the south-end of the backyard."

You can access the 23-page application HERE.

Now, there's no saying that this patent will turn into an actual Amazon service. They actually filed for the patent in 2014 and it was only approved in October 2017. But we do know the company is thinking hard about food (after their recent purchase of Whole Foods) and how to monetize that market. And the garden market may be part of the equation.



The River Ridge Holiday Greens Report

Yesterday, you received the special edition *Acres Online* that outlined my recent neighborhood survey. I'll recap it here for those of you who accidently deleted it along with all those post-Christmas weight-loss scam emails.

In a nutshell, overall decorating for Winter 2017 was up over 2016, with some 273 homes (77%) having some form of real or plastic decoration, and just 83 neighbors being Scrooges*. That compares to 256 decorators (72%) and 101 Scrooges in 2016. Here's the data:

	2017	2016	2015
Decorated	77%	72%	82%
Scrooge	23%	28%	18%
Greens	20%	16%	24%
Only greens	6%	7%	6%
Fake	94%	92%	94%
Both	14%	8%	18%
Inflatables	10%	5%	8%

Unfortunately, 2017 isn't the high point: In the 2015 inaugural greens report, 82% of homes had

decorations—that's 18 more homes. Perhaps December was a bit warmer for decorating; this year we had good light-hanging weather around and just after Thanksgiving, but then it turned bitterly cold, and that may have deterred some folks.

When it comes to greens, our favorite category, 55 homes (20%) that were decorated had some form of real, fresh-cut greens. That's up from 16% last year, but down from 24% in 2015. Interestingly, the number of homes that had ONLY greens—no plastic decorations at all—has remained consistent at 6%/7%/6% over the three years of the survey.

**Reader Lloyd Traven took exception to my calling non-decorators "Scrooges," pointing out, quite rightly, that they may be Jewish, or Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Atheist, and do not see winter holiday decorating as important. Very true, Lloyd! However, I do hope they aren't anti-gardening come spring!*



Which greens are most popular?

In 2015, wreaths were No. 1, with 49 of 69 folks (71%) having them. Last year, that dropped to 23 out of 40 (57.5%). This year, we again counted 23 wreaths, out of 55 homes with greens (42%). Without data, one would guess that wreaths would be the most popular greens item, but nope.

This year, that title goes to garland: We counted long ropes of garland at 25 out of 55 homes (45.5%). That's up from 15 homes (37.5%) last year and 14 homes (20%) the year before. Not sure why garland has gained in popularity, but there you go!



Also up—in fact, way up—is pots of greens. We counted them at 20 homes (36%). That's up from 12 homes (30%) and 13 homes (19%) the previous two years. I credit our local Home Depot, which had an enormous display of mixed greens containers at various price points spread across the apron all season long. Laurie confirmed that most of what she saw probably came from that display, which is the closest to River Ridge. Maybe the garland came from there, too.



How does Christmas compare to spring and fall?

In a word, it dominates. We've long known that Christmas is the No. 1 decorating holiday, in dollars. But it's been said that Halloween is gaining on it. Maybe so in expenditures, but in participation, winter is king, with 77% participation, compared to 66% of my neighbors decorating for fall.

Alas, spring gardening came in third in 2017, at 58%. However, it's not so bleak when you consider that spring gardening is made up of 100% agricultural products, while agriculture only accounts for about 58% of fall decorating and 20% of winter décor. So it could be worse!



What's most popular in GrowerTalks?

I was hoping to give you a most-clicked-article listing for 2017, but with the change to a new website (What? You haven't seen it? Check it out at www.growertalks.com), our statistical analysis ability has been somewhat split in two—before October 2 and after October 2. Getting the full data would take more time than I have, so I'll share the top 10 most popular stories with web searchers since October 2. Oh, keep in mind that these weren't all written in 2017—one goes back to 2010, proving that good information is timeless:

10. Understanding Dissolved Oxygen, by Kurt Becker

9. A Toast to pH, by Lynn Griffith

8. Producing High-Quality Plugs, by Allison Hurt and Roberto Lopez

7. The Nicest People Grow Plants, by Chris Beytes

6. The Engineering Behind Rooftop Greenhouses, by Jennifer Zurko

5. Oh, the Places You'll Go: Study Abroad in Poland, by Allison Westbrook

4. Water: Little-Known Benefits of Wetting Agents, by Kathleen Conard

3. Ferneries Take Hit from Hurricanes, by Ellen C. Wells

2. Distylium: The Best New Plant You've Never Heard of, by Dr. Michael Dirr

1. Combining Pesticides with Fertilizers, by Lynn Griffith



Finally …



The Wall of Love | teleflora

Hortistician Marvin Miller shared this FEEL-GOOD VIDEO from Teleflora, in which they built a wall of bouquets in Washington, D.C., then followed along as passersby took the wall down and shared the love. It's powerful and should be done by our industry across the nation!





Happy New Year!



Chris Beytes
Editor
GrowerTalks and *Green Profit*

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