Amazon can’t match us, plus gifting, summer annuals and tours



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Green Profit’s buZZ

Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

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A Gift Card Idea

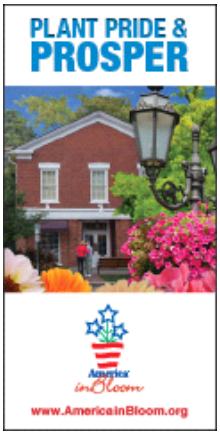
While the holidays may be over, giving gifts is always in season. Whether it’s Valentine’s Day, a birthday, Mother’s/Father’s Day or what have you, there’s always a reason to have a gift in mind or even a gift on hand.

Longtime friend and industry member Sue DiStaulo shared with us what she considers a “brilliant idea.” In fact, it’s so brilliant, as she says, “I’m not an online shopper but I would participate in this one.”



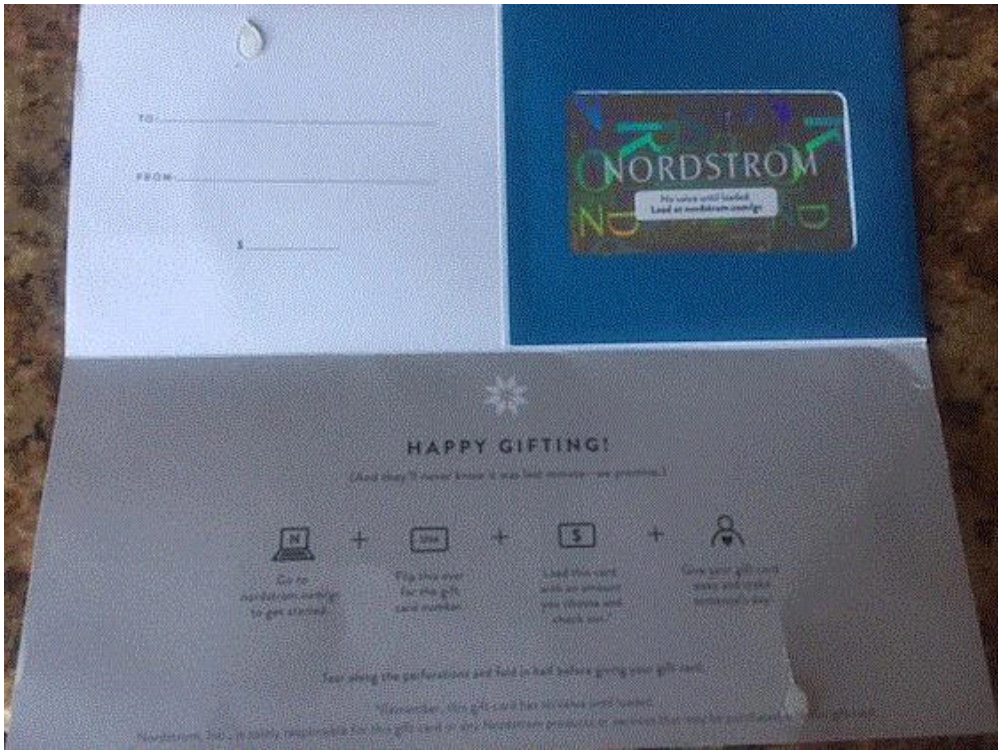








A Nordstrom shopper, Sue received in the mail what she thought was something from the store's rewards program. But it was different in that it contained a gift card.



"Once I read it, I understood what it was," Sue emailed. "They actually sent me a gift card—un-loaded—that I could go online and load myself in case I needed a last-minute gift! No need to run to a store. It gave me all the convenience right at my fingertips. They even included an envelope, as well." (I could have used one of those from Dunkin' Donuts for my mailman!)

Sue speculates that they likely didn't send this unloaded gift card to everyone but likely went off some sort of list or receipts. "But the fact is, they've made it easier for me to give a quick gift whenever I need it."

While she didn't know if this unloaded gift card was a new concept or not, Sue suggested it might be something for IGCs to look into, maybe looking at the store's loyalty program list and sending these to folks who shop most frequently.

Thanks for the idea, Sue!



Gimme Color

Last week I asked readers for suggestions of what to cover in 2018, and someone suggested bedding plant growers who grow mostly annuals. Well, good. I have something (or two things, even) that relates.

Earlier this week as I (and likely many of you) sat in prolonged deep cold, I received an e-newsletter from Armstrong Garden Centers. They're the ones who have multiple locations out in California (and likely not experiencing a polar vortex). "Ready for Color?" the subject line asked. I certainly am!

Armstrong was promoting two sales, one of which was on colorbowls of annuals. "Pick up a beautiful blooming colorbowl to perk up your porch or patio. Brimming with blooms perfect for a pop of color anywhere," the e-ad mentions.



Ahhhh … even looking at this colorful ad makes me a tad bit warmer.

While chatting about the Nordstrom gift card, I asked Sue (who happens to work for Armstrong's growing division) what their hot plant or plants were during a California winter. "The hot plant for us right now is the Senetti," she responded. "Full of color, durable and can withstand our ups and downs in the weather."

Shoulder-season annuals … they may not be bedding plants but they're the first items up to feed the color-starved masses when spring arrives.

Now, excuse me while I go pick up what a "snow bomb cyclone" just dropped.



Find New Plants

Maybe some of you growers and garden centers are still looking for new annuals (and other things) to add to your benches this year. If so, the National Garden Bureau is ready to lend you a hand.

NGB has compiled pretty much all of the 2018 varieties offered by their breeder partners into a searchable New Varieties section on their website.



“Aw, but I saw them at Spring Trials last year,” you’re saying. You likely didn’t see everything. So, while you’re sitting near your space heater trying to keep warm, take a gander at the NGB New Plants database to find the newest plants that’ll help you make money in the coming months.



GCA Summer Tour

Since we are talking about summer-appropriate things, let’s talk about the GCA Summer Tour. You’ll recall this year’s tour is headed to Seattle, Washington, and takes place June 24-27.

The GCA organizers have just released the full list of stops for the Seattle tour and there are some great ones on the agenda! These stops include:

- Branches Garden Center, Auburn
- Flower World, Inc., Snohomish
- Li'l Sprout Nursery & Garden Center, Mill Creek
- Magnolia Garden Center, Seattle
- McAuliffe's Valley Nursery, Snohomish
- Molbak's Garden + Home, Woodinville
- Ravenna Gardens, Seattle
- Sky Nursery, Shoreline
- Swansons Nursery, Seattle
- Watson's Greenhouse & Nursery, Puyallup
- Wells Medina Nursery, Medina
- West Seattle Nursery & Garden Center, Seattle
- Windmill Gardens, Sumner

Certainly a great lineup. More details are forthcoming in the weeks ahead, and we’ll bring ‘em to you here when we get them.

Registration is open! You can make your summer (vacation) plans HERE. There’s even an early-bird special!

A Different Set of Tours

While I'm on the topic of tours, TPIE (Tropical Plant International Expo) has two half-day tours (12 – 5 p.m.) lined up for Tuesday, January 16, the day TPIE opens in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

The first is the Garden & Design Road Show. You'll head north of Ft. Lauderdale to visit private residential properties in Palm Beach and Boca Raton and also a high-end commercial project that'll get your inner designer pumped up for sure. Tour attendees will be joined by a team from Fernando Wong Outdoor Living Design, Inc., one of the top landscape architecture firms in the United States. REGISTER HERE.

The second option is the Production Road Show. Also heading north of the city, you'll tour three nurseries in the Palm Beach area: Excelsa Gardens, Gray's Ornamentals and K&M Nursery. BUT, here's the thing. Production Road Show: One bus has already been filled. If there's enough interest in filling a second bus, they can certainly prepare for that. If you would like to be placed on a waiting list, please contact Linda Reindl at lreindl@fngla.org.

The afternoon tours are $60 each if you register by January 5—that's tomorrow! So register quickly!

Amazon Can't Match Us

In the past two weeks, my colleagues Chris Beytes and Jennifer White have both written about Amazon in their respective newsletters (his HERE and hers HERE). As an increasingly frequent and more comfortable online shopper—almost exclusively Amazon—I thought I'd add to the discussion.

Chris mentioned Amazon's new Plants Store. (Go ahead and take a moment to TAKE A LOOK—but come back here after!) Why shouldn't they sell plants, he says? They sell pretty much everything else. And he points out, "If the current crop of big boxes haven't put you under, Amazon won't, either." He argues it's the other online plant sellers that should be shaking in their boots since Amazon has their logistics down pat.

It's easy to see the link between Amazon's Plants Store and their newly patented "garden service." As Jen explained, this service looks to match customers' gardens with the products they might most need. They will do this by having algorithms and image recognition software make recommendations for, we can assume, products on their site—including their Plants Store.

Should we fear? Should we put up the For Sale sign, sell the land and move to a location without snow bomb cyclones? I argue no. Especially if you're up for making your retail store align with the slowly changing idea of what a brick-and-mortar retail store entails: knowledgeable customer service, activities, engagement, a sense of community—even some entertainment and eating opportunities thrown in, too. We aren't dollar stores, after all.

With all of their deals and convenience and shipping logistics, Amazon can't match that.

Send In Your YRA Nominee

The *Green Profit*/Dümmen Orange Young Retailer Award nominations are open and ready for your input! We are looking for the best 35-and-under folks in the garden center business. Be they owners, managers, buyers, merchandisers … we've seen all types of submissions from all over

the country (and Canada, too).

You're familiar with what these young folks go through. We pick three finalists, have them write a 600-word essay (at the peak spring sales time, by the way) and subject them to an interview with our four judges. For all that work and frustration, the finalists are given a trip to Cultivate'18 on Ball Publishing's dime where the winner will be announced at Cultivate's Unplugged event. Fun, every single moment of it!

If you have a nominee in mind, we welcome you to fill out the nomination form HERE. We've made it quick and easy but remember, the more details you provide, the more we can evaluate the nominee for finalist worthiness.

They're doing the same thing over at *GrowerTalks* too, but with growers! You can find the Young Grower Award nomination form HERE.

We Want Your Houseplant Department Pics

Friends, we are working on an occasional series for *Green Profit* that helps you make the most of your houseplant department. We'll break down a segment of the department—could be succulents, could be tropicals, could be associated products—and give suggestions for signage content, workshop ideas, cross-merchandising opportunities and the like.

To get some ideas, we'd love your photos of your houseplant department! Got something great going on in it? Then tell us what you are doing right. Share your thoughts and photos HERE. And thank you!

Questions? Comments? Suggestions? Please do drop me a line at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



Ellen Wells
Editor-at-Large
Green Profit

This week's BuZZ! was sent to 20,829 loyal readers!

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