GROWERTALKS

Acres & Acres

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The Year in Rearview

Chris Beytes



The pandemic has dominated our lives and the news since March, but believe it or not, other stuff has happened, too, so I thought I'd go back through the year to remind you of what else took place in 2020 (with a bit of COVID news thrown in because it's unavoidable).

January. I attended what turned out to be my only two live shows of the year, TPIE in Florida and IPM Essen in Germany, where it was obvious that houseplants continue to be on trend with consumers (who had no idea they were about to be locked in their homes). Aroids were the "it" plant of 2020, and at TPIE, a food-truck-turned-plant-truck by the new business Aroid Greenhouses caught everyone's attention. At IPM, I saw a lettuce plant vending machine, sweaters on amaryllis bulbs and I helped name Dutch young plant grower Anthura the International Grower of the Year. Also in January, the MANTS show turned 50, Beacon Impatiens made an appearance at the GRAMMYs and Katie Dubow took over Garden Media Group from her mom, Suzi McCoy, who started the business in 1987.

February. Bad news about changes to the International Energy Conservation Code that will probably impact any new greenhouse construction. It will require greenhouses to meet the same sort of energy requirements as a home or office, with roof glazing now being equated to skylights and side glazing equating to windows.

March. On March 10, with pandemic news coming out of China and Italy, I wrote the headline, "Coronavirus: good for gardening." I said, "I do see a silver lining that we should all keep in mind: Less travel = staycations = gardening, decorating and growing food!" I'm glad I was right.

April. The first of my Spring Sales Surveys came in and indications were that Spring was going to be good. Wrote Alex Van Der Hengst of South Central Growers in Tennessee, "Was it the biggest weekend we've ever had? Nope. However, for this time of the year and the uncertainty that is currently going around, sales were absolutely phenomenal." His cousin Abe at Metrolina gave us our first glimpse of the veggie boom, writing, "Veggie/Herb sales 4X that of regular COMP (if sale were up 20%,
veggie/herbs were up 80%)."

May. I was saddened to report the sudden passing of my friend Sonny Hummert at the age of 78 (but he always seemed about 60). Who in horticulture hasn't poured over the pages of the fat Hummert International catalog? Mean-

while, garden centers were reporting record-breaking sales.

June. Syngenta named Mark Schermer as global head of Syngenta Flowers. Costa Farms continued to grow, acquiring the facilities of Florida's DeLeon's Bromeliads, one of the largest growers of bromeliads and orchids in the country. And Gary Falkenstein, a veteran of Ball, Fischer, Syngenta and ePlantsource, an online brokerage he'd launched, passed away at the age of 75.

July. After 30 years of service, the California Cut Flower Commission is no more after the state's cut flower growers voted to suspend operations. But the commission will be replaced by Certified American Grown—the first new flower trade association since AmericanHort was formed by the merger of ANLA and OFA.

August. Ball Publishing celebrated the 1,000th issue of *GrowerTalks* (the first was May 1937), but we mourned the passing of garden center industry icon Ernest Wertheim, who had celebrated his 100th birthday the previous December. Ernest had been designing gardens and garden centers since 1940!

September. I reported that a New Zealand plant enthusiast paid NZ $8,150 (US $5,398) for a four-leafed *Rhaphidophora tetrasperma*, one of the split-leaf types of aroids.

October. Alas, more passings: Dave "Dr. K" Koranski and George Lucht. Plus, the closing of Grimes Seed after 95 years in business.

November. We learned that garden mum sales had been as strong as spring bedding plant sales—even though my River Ridge neighbors didn't buy any more of them than usual (they went for pumpkins instead). And we got word of a new executive position at Ball: President of Ball Horticultural Company, the umbrella corporation over Ball Seed, PanAmerican Seed, et al. Al Davidson took the spot.

December. Well, you're living it now, whereas I'm writing this in mid-November, so I don't know what news December will bring. A closure to the election, I hope, and good news about a COVID vaccine (for which I will get in line now, in a lawn chair like awaiting a new iPhone, if it will let me get back to visiting greenhouses again). **GT**