

GROWERTALKS

Front Lines

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Proven Winners Goes for Foliage

Chris Beytes & Ellen C. Wells



With so many new gardeners having entered the horticultural marketplace over the last two years (upwards of 16 million or more, we hear), you've got to do all you can to keep them interested. And as Proven Winners realizes, that interest should be sustained all year long. Houseplants and foliage are the perfect way to appeal to customers young and old, new and loyal

from January through December. And that was the impetus for Proven Winners to get into the foliage market with a new houseplant program. They'd been collecting foliage genetics for a number of years, but needed a foliage-specific production partner to bring those genetics (and more) to market under the Proven Winners brand—kinda like a songwriter needs a singer to bring the song into the world, right? That's where The Plant Company comes in.

But, first, who is The Plant Company? Chris Beytes gave us a rundown on the whos, whats, hows and wheres of The Plant Company, and the long and short of it is this: It's a 5-acre, state-of-the-art greenhouse that went up this past January in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western Virginia and is owned by Jason and Wesley vanWingerden, sons of John vanWingerden of Green Circle Growers and Express Seed. Joining them is Frank Paul, Jason's brother-in-law and former head orchid grower for Green Circle. They grow foliage year-round, from liners to finished and in the European way.

"Why Virginia?" was one of the questions Chris asked Jason. "We wanted to find an area where the climate was a better fit for foliage, where it's not so far south where you get the extreme heat during the summertime—that's why we picked Virginia, up in the Blue Ridge Mountains ... a higher elevation, better night temps during the summertime." And they'll have better access to customers and all routes across the country (if anyone listened to the "How I Built This" podcast episode with Roxanne Quimby, you'll know that's one reason Burt's Bees moved from Maine to North Carolina).

What The Plant Company gets from the partnership is immediate access to the Proven Winners brand and marketing programs, synergies with existing Proven Winners licensees, their retail support programs, and inclusion in Proven Winners' trade and consumer marketing campaigns. Plus, they'll be able to tap into Proven Winners' direct-to-consumer e-commerce expertise and platforms.

For Proven Winners, they get a great new partnership with an awesome supply of foliage. Said Dave Konsoer, Director of Sales for Proven Winners, of the pairing, "By bringing a strong and up-and-coming houseplant supplier

into the Proven Winners family, consumers will be able to find top-quality houseplants under a name they know and trust, resulting in an even stronger brand for retailers and consumers.”

We reached out to Dave for news on marketing, positioning, packaging and the like, and his response was that this project was still so new, there’s nothing ready for a prime-time reveal quite yet. We can tell you though that The Plant Company will be selling more than 100 items exclusively under the Proven Winners brand as of January 1. Until then, The Plant Company is selling a great array of foliage and houseplant items on their own—find them listed as Green Sprouts on their website. **GP**