

GROWERTALKS

Cover Story

3/1/2022

New Products in Person

Chris Beytes & Matthew Chappell

Plant introductions from TPIE

Even though new varieties seem to always be the lifeblood of the plant industry, the houseplant world is doing amazingly well with the old stuff. Sansevieria collecting is a bonafide thing among “plant parents” (another bonafide thing) and even cutting-edge companies like LiveTrends Design are making a killing with tillandsias (in way-cool containers, of course).

Still, there was some very nice new foliage on display at TPIE. Whether or not it's available is a question you'll have to ask the suppliers. Start your ongoing relationship with them now to at least get in line.

***Geogenanthus ciliatus* Geo**

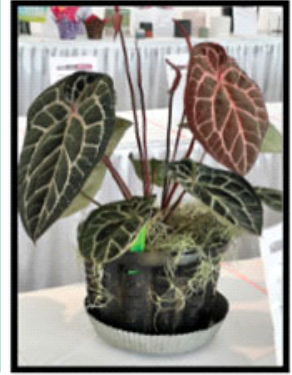
Costa Farms' plant hunter Mike Rimland tells us that, as far as he knows, this is the first new houseplant genus introduced to the market since calathea in the 1980s. But that's just one reason it was selected by the buyers at TPIE as the Favorite New Foliage Plant winner. The others would be the thick foliage, which Mike says is a sign of a good indoor plant, and the deep green-burgundy color with a high sheen. It's part of Costa's “Trending Tropicals” line.

In addition, Costa showed nine others in the new variety showcase, including Holy Moly Monstera (which will be an Instagram darling) and a cool *Philodendron squamiferum*, which has hairy red stems, so it seems their pipeline is full. www.costafarms.com

Anthurium Michelle

Anthuriums bloom (as do most plants, for that matter), which is why *A. magnificum* Michelle from Living Colors Nursery was picked as the Favorite New Flowering Plant by the TPIE buyers. But it's as much a foliage plant as anything, featuring big, durable, velvety leaves of dark green, red and purple with contrasting white and pinkish veins. It was bred by physician/horticulturist Dr. Jeff Block of Miami who named it for his wife. Lucky lady!

www.livingcolors.com



Elephant ears

From Dr. Bob Hartman of Classic Caladiums by way of Texas bulb distributor Abbott-Ipco come some spectacular alocasias and colocasias—elephant ears, to the consumer who wants a big, spectacular tropical plant. The tubers are the size of footballs, points out Nelson Darden (pictured). What's the difference between the two? From the Classic website: "Alocasias produce an elephant ear with the leaves pointed upright and will grow in height over time. With proper nutrients and watering, alocasia elephant ears can grow as tall as 6 ft. over time ... colocasia elephant ears produce leaves that point downward. These plants will range in height from 3 ft. to 6 ft. depending on watering and care."

Pair either of them with your favorite caladiums in patio pots or directly in the landscape, they suggest. www.abbott-ipco.com, www.classicalcaladiums.com

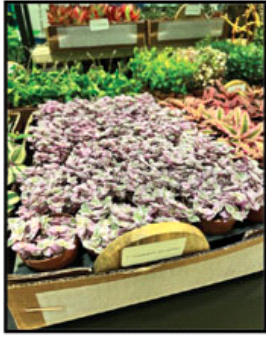
Red Moon Philodendron

A Cool Product Award winner from R&D Nurseries, Red Moon Philodendron catches the eye with its striking colors. The foliage starts green, gets beautiful chartreuse and red leaves, and sometimes the "half moon" pattern of red and chartreuse on one leaf. Supply is extremely tight right now, which means prices are extremely high—pretty much in the "if you have to ask, you can't afford it" category. But fear not—it's bound to come down as supply ramps up. And they have a full "Rare Plant Collection" that includes unusual philodendron, calathea and monstera species. R&D produced TC liners and finished plants from 2-in. to 14-in. www.rdnurseriesinc.com

Whale Fin Albo

How nice that one of the toughest houseplants—sansevieria—is also one of the hottest, with fans collecting all the shapes and colors. Whale Fin Albo from Aroid Greenhouses is one more cool one that joins the other half dozen or so they offer. It caught the eyes of the Cool Product judges. www.aroidgreenhouses.com





Pink Panther

Is it tradescantia? Or is it callisia? Technically, we're told it's callisia, a tradescantia relative, but we've always called it a "ball plant" for its tidy shape. Regardless, Pink Panther from Holt Nurseries is their newest offering, selected as a Cool Product winner for its vivid pink-and-green foliage. Holt offers it in 2-in. pots.

www.holtnurseries.com

Gotta Go Grass

We're told today's young, hip consumer wants a plant that's not just ornamental, but functional, too. Well, there's no plant more functional for your pet than a soft patch of indoor turf upon which he or she can do his or her business. Gotta Go Grass from Bethel Farms is "the natural pet-relief option," perfect for high-rises, yachts or anyplace your pet might be far from a real spot to go. Available to consumers online, Bethel says garden centers can sell it, too.

www.gottagograss.com

Highlights from MANTS

There are times when a series of events seems to thwart our efforts at pulling off the best possible event. Such was the case with Day One of MANTS. The COVID-Omicron variant and Mother Nature's dumping of up to a foot of snow upon the Washington, D.C., to Baltimore corridor definitely classifies as a perfect storm. As a result, general attendance wasn't up to par or even close to it. There was also a noticeable lack of growers, with most growing operations sending a skeleton crew to staff booths.

Having said that, plant buyers were on the show floor and it seemed that for nurseries, it wasn't a total bust. For branding companies and equipment dealers/suppliers (who rely on growers showing up), it's a disappointing event. But most understand the circumstances and spirits remain high for another good year.

Dramm/Baccara ii ri Smart Irrigation Controller

Leave it to Dramm to engineer a product we've been wanting for years. The ii ri Smart Irrigation Controller is a battery-operated, Bluetooth-connected, irrigation controller that screws right into a solenoid (latching) valve without wiring. It can be used on nursery pads, in commercial or home landscapes, veggie gardens or on a mist bench.

What makes it so versatile is that the operator can set up different programs on a smartphone and upload them to the ii ri Smart Controller instantly to change irrigation programs. You can purchase the controller separately and use it with existing solenoids or you can get it with the Dramm solenoid, which is a nice choice to have.

www.dramm.com

CD-X1 Pot Dispenser

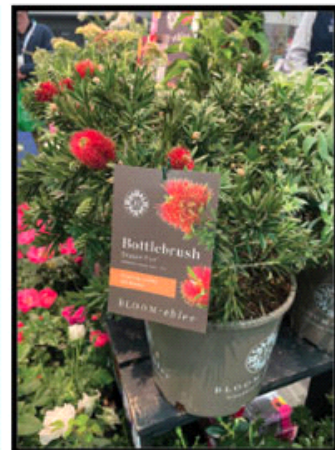
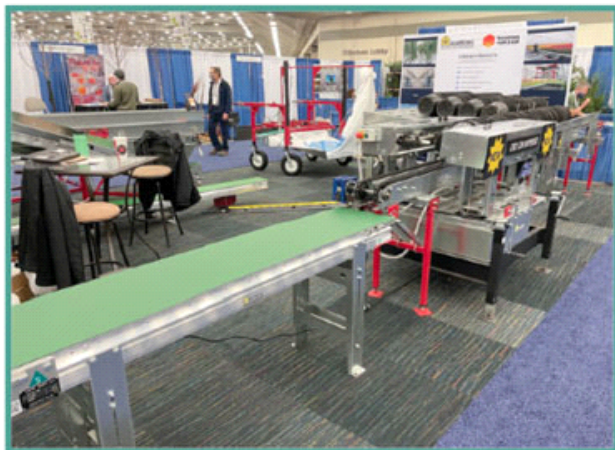
The CD-X1 from AgriNomix is not the first pot-separating machine, but it is the first that feeds pots reliably onto a belt that can reliably be directly connected to a pot-filling machine/auto-planter. The machine was operating for a few minutes, during which time it had one blank space from a missed pot. Not too shabby. You can also pre-load about 12 sleeves of full 3-gallon cans on the rack, which would be orderly funneled down to the separator.

The CD-X1 works with pots ranging in diameter from 6.5-in. to 15-in. (including various lips and sidewall shapes). Pots are mechanically separated quickly and reliably, and then moved along a chain conveyor and tipped upright onto an inline conveyor ready to be filled. An informal count while standing there equaled a pot about every 1.1 seconds. Again, not too shabby. www.agrinomix.com

Dragon Fire Bottlebrush

Star Roses & Plants (and the Bloomables brand) also had a good showing at MANTS, with several snazzy new cultivars on display. One that we were particularly intrigued with was Dragon Fire Bottlebrush (*Callistemon viminalis*). First, as an outstanding pollinator plant. Second, as a species that stands up to abiotic (disease and insect pressure) and biotic stresses (particularly drought) better than most species. Finally, when it blooms, it's just plain cool.

Now Dragon Fire has one particular attribute that lends itself well to the landscape. At about 3 ft. with a rounded habit, it's well-suited for smaller spaces and mass plantings. It's only Zone 8 hardy, but given the big leap forward in plant size (or lack thereof), where it's hardy it's sure to be useful. www.starrosesandplants.com



Bloomin' Easy Southern Plant Collection

The newest twist in Bloomin' Easy's market strategy is to finally take their well-earned credibility as a great company branding great plants down south. Their new Southern Collection was released at MANTS, whereby they're teaming up with Greenleaf Nursery in Oklahoma (with operations also in Texas and North Carolina) to ensure all of these new southern varieties thrive in the region's conditions.

It's apparent that they've thought about the big picture and started with a lineup of species that are southern classics with cultivars that have wide adaptability across the south and great landscape performance. www.bloomineasyplants.com GT