


Quick ideas from IGC Show tour, plus Bower & Branch news and those  
dinos





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## COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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## What A Week!

The week of the IGC Show in Chicago is always busy. There's all the good stuff from the Retail Store Tour, the keynotes and then the show itself to view and then go through afterward. And then there's reporting on it so you good folks can benefit from everything I saw. Whew!

My plan is to go through the tour stuff today and then include some keynote and vendor highlights over the next few weeks. Today's store tour recap will include just the things that you can implement pretty quickly.

With that said, I'll start at the start, which was our visit to Christy Webber Farm & Garden in Chicago. This retail store is the "public face" of the landscape firm Christy Webber Landscapes, one of the heavyweights in Chicagoland.

Like any good landscape-focused company does, they landscaped not only the perimeter of the store along the fence line ...



... they also landscaped the area around the limited number of parking spaces.



The front of the store was along a sidewalk, which they decked out with beautiful containers. Take a look at this container:





The “container” is an inverted tree stump, roots and all—and not a small one, either!



## Color, Color, Color

We all know the old real estate mantra, “location, location, location.” For retailers of a certain sort (like us), a second and nearly-as-important mantra is “color, color, color.” And gosh, did Pesche's Garden Center in Des Plaines come through on that promise. Their benches were so full of blooming annuals you'd have thought it was June. And I'm not talking mums, either.





Why do we need annual color so “late” in the season? Because my mother has been looking for some, and if my mother is looking for flowering annuals, other mothers (and fathers and people in general) are looking for it, too.

Speaking of color, how about a little neon color?





I can't recall ever seeing a neon sign in a garden center before. Can you?



## Hawthorn Gardens

This IGC in Hawthorn Woods had a sign near its store entrance that a lot of us on the tour stopped to admire.

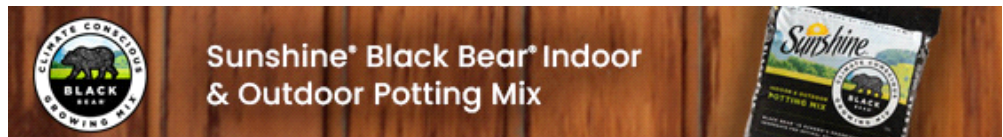


Habitat for Humanity and numerous other not-for-profit organizations (including community gardens) are in need garden tools. Customers can drop off their old tools and pick up new ones at your retail establishment. It's one of those really nice things to do for others.

Here's a bonus: This here is the best idea I've seen all summer.



Anyone else doing this?



## Staying Organized

The write-up on Lurvey Landscape Supply (Des Plaines) in the IGC Show Store Tour Guide told folks to watch for the "organized display cases of natural stone, pavers and other landscaping materials."







It says "landscape supply" right in their name, so they better have an outstanding landscape materials display. These rack systems are a great way keep all of their stone offerings organized, well displayed and safe for customers. Engineered and natural stone account for about 10% of their sales—this may be why!



## Gethsemane Garden Center

This Chicago store is gorgeous, colorful, well-stocked ... there's a lot I could say! But I'm going to keep it simple. I liked this one trick they employed to add some interest to a flat (a.k.a. boring) wall:





Cover panels of different shapes with a colorful fabric and hang on the wall. It's one of those easy HGTV-type ideas that work. And it's simple.

## A Bonus Stop

We stopped at Henri Studio in Wauconda for a tour and a tasty lunch. While not a garden center, it was still a great stop for folks because they learned about the statuary many of them carry. Like these gnomes, for instance.



The guy on the right is created using a mold like this ...





... which is filled with a simple slurry of limestone, sand and good-ol' Lake Michigan water. It cures for a day, the mold is removed and then it goes through a staining process.

Inside the Henri Studio we got to meet two of their sculptors, who were crafting designs out of clay. I asked how long it typically takes to go from carving a miniature version of a statue or fountain to producing the final product. It's about two months on average, with bigger, more elaborate works like fountains taking up to a year.

Oh, and if you have an idea for a custom statue, their ears are open!

## Bower & Branch Buys

*Chris Beytes did such a good job writing up the Bower & Branch information for Acres Online, I'm just gonna take it word for word. Here's the news:*

The consolidation continues ... and this time at the hands of one of our industries newest entities, which is also one of our first online and mobile shopping brands.

**Bower & Branch** announced today that it has acquired the organic fertilizer company **Organic Plant Magic**. If you aren't yet familiar with Bower & Branch, they do online sales of trees, shrubs, perennials and other plants (an ever-increasing line) online, but fulfill them through partner growers and independent retailers.

Sid Raisch, President and CEO of Bower & Branch, said in the press release, "This acquisition

has been in the works for a while. Aligning Organic Plant Magic within Bower & Branch is a strategic opportunity that ensures our supply chain will grow seamlessly as our online sales continue to grow.”

“This partnership is the next generation of business models,” said Organic Plant Magic founder Kerry Richardson. “Through the unique robust capacities of Bower & Branch to speak directly with consumers, growers and the marketplace, we now have the ability to reach and assist more people and the environment, as well as continue to develop even more helpful innovations.”

Kerry will continue to serve on the Bower & Branch Board of Directors and co-founder Kevin Richardson will join the Bower & Branch product development team.

I asked Sid, via email, my usual “Why?” question. I got one hint when I looked at the packaging of Organic Plant Magic and Bower & Branch’s Elements Fertilizer—it was clear the former manufactures the latter. Sid confirmed that.

“We were becoming the majority of the sales of Organic Plant Magic, which left both of us vulnerable to the other,” he offered as one of three reasons for the acquisition. “Bower & Branch needed to secure the future availability of the Elements Fertilizer and some other products we were working together on to bring to market, and the Richardsons had nearly all their eggs in one basket, so they put the rest in.”

The other two reasons focus on the success of the customer.

“In brick-&-mortar garden centers, only around 10% to 15% of customers who buy plants leave with fertilizer, which I think we all agree is essential for the establishment and health of our plants,” Sid said. “We’ve found that online, we get well over 60% to buy Elements Fertilizer and at a much higher average price point than most stores offer. This tells us there is growth potential, but most importantly, there is success potential for more consumers.”

In addition:

“Across America, people always tell us they have some form of crappy soil. Most areas it is clay, some it is sand and rarely is it loam. This is because the subsoil that is excavated when homes are built is smeared around and that’s the majority of what everyone is planting in. Elements Fertilizer has the ingredients to change this subsoil (sub meaning not really soil at all) into something a plant can sustain in at some level.”

To help ensure that customers actually make use of the fertilizer, it’s a required part of Bower & Branch’s three-year plant guarantee.

Organic Plant Magic has an interesting back story that starts with ski patrolling in Alaska and a chance encounter with organic plant guru Jeff Lowenfels. You can read that story [HERE](#).

*Chris joked at the end of his piece that his only challenge with Bower & Branch is getting them mixed up with [Boll & Branch](#), the fancy bed linen supplier.*

## Finally ...

Back in June, I included a few of Jen Polanz’s picks from the GCA Summer Tour in Seattle, including some cute dinosaur containers. A reader wrote in to find out who was selling them—and I’m not sure we ever found out the information.

But ... good news! I think I found the same set of dinosaurs while walking the aisles at this week’s IGC Show.





These are from a company called Kikkerland Design, and boy do they have some really cool stuff! Aside from the dinosaurs, they had a ton of fun, wonky gadgets including a solar-powered, arm-waving gnome. I just checked out their [SITE](#) and this Plantasaurus Rex is right on the home page—along with some cat butt magnets that I actually have on my fridge!

I'll review the new and new-to-you items we spotted on the IGC Show floor next week. Meanwhile, have any comments, questions or suggestions? Email me at [ewells@ballpublishing.com](mailto:ewells@ballpublishing.com).

**Ellen Wells**  
Editor-at-Large  
**Green Profit**

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