

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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A Prize-Winning Oasis

Chris Beytes



Victor and Leslie Rodriguez, owners of 305 Farms, celebrate their win in the “Best Use of Plants—Large” category (meaning a booth of 300 sq. ft. or over) at the Tropical Plant International Exposition (TPIE) held in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, last month. They filled their 20 ft. x 40 ft. island booth with just 31 giant palm trees from their 100-acre Homestead nursery.

Victor gives the credit to his wife, who told us, “I wanted people to walk in and feel like they were in a backyard.” The booth certainly did that, with strings of lights, candles (battery powered), comfortable seating, a dining table and more.

305 Farms was one of 12 exhibitors winning booth awards and one of more than 420 exhibitors at TPIE, including 67 first-timers (one of whom you’ll meet in the March issue). As one of the first industry trade shows of the year, it’s the perfect place for growers and retailers to get inspired for the coming season—especially when it comes to tropical house and patio plants. The exhibitor showcase was crowded with folks looking for the newest foliage and flowering plants and products to support them. Foliage powerhouse Costa Farms had 10 new varieties on display (the maximum allowed), all of which were unusual and all of which will be available in large quantities.



While no attendance figures were available as of press time, pre-registration numbers were strong, reports FNGLA COO Shawn Pattison—up 12% over the same date from the previous year. And while much of the south was under a deep freeze and even snow, Ft. Lauderdale was unscathed except for some cool drizzle ... which one could argue kept visitors off the beaches and on the show floor.



We encountered one such exhibitor from a New Jersey nursery, who reported his best January ever, with strong orders and sales from his warehouse club customer. Based on that, he was bullish

on the coming season. All we needed to hope and pray for, we both agreed, was good weather. **GT**