GROWERTALKS

Cover Story

3/1/2025

Shopping the Shows

Jennifer Polanz, Ellen C. Wells & Jennifer Zurko

Atlanta Market



by Jennifer Polanz

The atmosphere at market this January was upbeat and what I would call cautiously optimistic. Tariffs were an occasional topic, particularly with so much product coming from overseas, and I noticed more callouts to products made in the U.S.A. (including some I've covered here). Attendance was robust the first couple of days of market, particularly the first day of the temporaries. Several products caught my eye this year—here's a smattering.

There's virtually no plant material at market, so when I see something living I stop. Hence, why I maneuvered into the booth of **Daylily Nursery** from Rock Island, Tennessee, in the temporaries. They were showing off their beautiful waxed amaryllis bulbs. These were some of the biggest bulbs I've seen and they told me they're constantly designing new options for them, including wax with glitter and a grassy base with seasonal décor. They also make sure to pair the varieties with the base design so they complement each other when blooming. These waxed options are such a great living gift idea—easy for the giver and for the receiver.

One of the most eye-catching displays in The Gardens featured disco balls and Elvis' Burning Love blaring through the speakers. The product? Disco Inferno bird seed from **Mr. Bird**, a blend featuring medium chip sunflower, safflower, peanuts, cranberries, raisins, mealworms and gelatin with hot pepper spice. I spoke to owner Smith Birch, who said it's six times more potent than typical jalapeno-based mixes and twice as spicy as their current Flaming Hot Feast bird seed. It's available in a bell shape, as well as in 2- and 4-lb. bags, small and large cake style, and small and large cylinder shape. Those last two go with the cylinder feeders Mr. Bird is known for. Of course, spicy seed keeps away critters like squirrels, deer, skunks, rabbits and even bears!









Lighting has consistently been near the top of homeowners' outdoor décor wants, and **Alfresco Home** is meeting the moment with beautiful and practical outdoor lighting options. They're all made for outdoors with LED lights that are rechargeable (the same way you charge your phone), and come with a remote control. Some on display were tabletop options, while others were larger for patios and porches.

Lotus International has lots of new introductions every year, but I really liked the sets they were showing with inlay designs like these fern pots (there were other pots with different inlay designs, too). These come in two sizes, both with drainage holes, and they come with saucers. There are four sets in a case, two pieces in a set.

Houseplant lighting is a constant topic and **We the Wild** is addressing it with two new options for providing more light to those high-light loving plants. Their adjustable telescoping light can use a USB cord to recharge and the Instant Sun Grow Bulb can convert any standard lamp into a grow light. The bulbs have around a 50,000 hour lifespan.

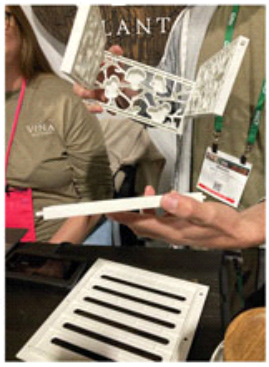
If you're looking to try cut flowers, but don't want to spend a lot of time sourcing products, consider **Syndicate Home & Garden's** new merchandising system and subscription service. The merchandising system is two-sided—one for cut flowers and the other for houseplant products. The cut flower side has a well for floral buckets at the bottom and shelves for vases and their "pillow" product to make floral arranging easier. The other side has shelves for plant pots, and accessories like spritzers and cloches. The shelves are adjustable. The program comes with a three month floral subscription April 14 – July 14 with seasonal-appropriate bouquets delivered every 10 to 14 days.

One of my last stops was in the **Candleberry** showroom because it was finally not crowded with people. This company ships out of Frankfurt, Kentucky, and introduced a brand new Pet Lovers collection for 2025. It features six dog and six cat styles, and all are different scents, but neutralize pet odor (a bonus!). Retailer buy-in is three dozen candles, three each of the 12 styles. The graphics on the candle are great, too!

TPIE

by Ellen C. Wells









The “I” in Tropical Plant International Expo could be replaced with the words “Innovation” and “Inspiration” without skipping a beat. The 2025 edition of TPIE was teeming with “Why didn’t I think of that?” products and “Wow, that’s so beautiful!” plants. Many of these came from those who are new to the industry, having found their way in by inventing products that solved their own problems.

Here’s a look at some of the innovative products we found on the show floor—plus two plants we just couldn’t pass up!

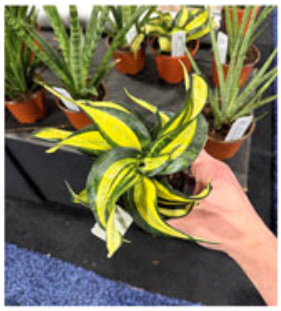
Couple Kris Kalkowski and Rickie Ritchie of **Drain Drawer Pots** developed their pot to solve their own in-home plant watering issues. Watering their plants thoroughly resulted in overflowing saucers and spills, even damaged furniture or floors. They designed a pot with a drawer. Extra water drains into the drawer, which you can pull out to empty in a sink or reuse in another plant. Pushing the drawer in a bit closes the drainage holes and allows water to collect in the pot’s base for bottom watering. Genius! The Drain Drawer Pot is available in seven colors and two sizes.

In 2021, Daphne Peters—owner of plant shop Daphne’s Botanicals in Portland, Oregon—and her husband Austin were searching for a way to help the store’s customers (and themselves) know more about their plants’ water needs. Taking inspiration from their young son’s bathtime books (the ones that change colors as they get wet), they hit upon the idea of creating a simple tool out of filter paper and hydrochromic ink. The result is the Biodegradable Moisture Meter from **PlantDoc**, a completely biodegradable product that visibly indicates the level of moisture in the plant pot’s soil. The whiter the meter stick, the closer the plant is getting to needing water. Each moisture meter stick lasts about one to two months (shorter for ferns, longer for cacti) and will fully decompose at the end of its use. They currently come in packs of five. They sell wholesale for retailers and also direct-to-consumer on Etsy and at their shop.









Several years back, Sarah Joy Figueredo of **Vina Planters**, whose booth won TPIE's Best Small Non-Plant Display Award, designed and laser cut an orchid-inspired picture frame for her grandmother, Vina. Years later her mother-in-law asked if she could create an orchid planter based on that same design. Sarah did, but out of wood. Thanks to the Florida heat and wet weather, that wooden planter soon crumbled. She set out to find a material that would not deteriorate so quickly (if at all), but also one that she could feel was somewhat sustainable. After some trial and error, she created the Vina Planter out of 100% recycled injection-molded polypropylene. What's really cool about these planters is that they disassemble via recessed stainless-steel screws. This allows you to take the entire planter apart to clean, or remove just the bottom to add in some more sphagnum moss while not disturbing the roots. It's a product 10 years in the making and they officially launched last year. Available in three sizes and four colors, and the stainless-steel chains are free!

You're gone for a long time and those inverted water bottles just don't provide enough water for your precious houseplants. The Cowbell Self-Watering Kit from **Cowbell Plant Co.** solves this. This patented device (and invented by an MIT grad and former business banker) uses pressure regulation technology to release water as plants need it. This is a lot different from the upside-down wine bottle options that release a slow, but constant, drip. Those water plants maybe up to 10 days. The Cowbell will water up to 35 days, depending on the plant. How? Once the pressure inside the reservoir decreases to a specific level, the lid valve automatically opens and closes to let air in, which equalizes the pressure inside the reservoir, letting water diffuse from the cone to hydrate your plant. Science! And while it looks like a beautiful glass bottle, it's actually a BPA-free, shatterproof, weatherproof, recyclable, luxury PET sourced from Japan. All other materials are as sustainably sourced as possible. Available in two sizes: 750ml and 250ml.

For the busy, the forgetful or those who just don't understand plant biology, plant and soil nutrition is a struggle. The folks at Sol Soils have designed a limited set of complementary nutrition and amendment products to make caring for the less-sexy parts of plant care more convenient and worry free. **Sol Biotics** contains four different products that you apply at regular intervals: The bi-monthly Repot Recovery to help de-stress plants; the alternating bi-monthly Necessary Nutrients to provide macronutrients and beneficial microbes; the monthly Monthly Myco with beneficial fungi and bacteria for a robust root system; and the quarterly Soil Salvation to refresh soils on a seasonal basis. All aspects of plant and soil care are attended to—and on a schedule! It's an easy to-do slipped into someone's calendar reminders.

If you ask me and colleague Jen Polanz, the price of vanilla is enough to make one close up the cookie shop (we're bakers and really good vanilla is quite pricey). What's the solution to pricey vanilla? Grow your own with *Vanilla planifolia* Sunshine State from **Agri-Starts**.

Jen and I are also plant lovers, so the opportunity to do the "grow your own" thing with vanilla beans is an adventure

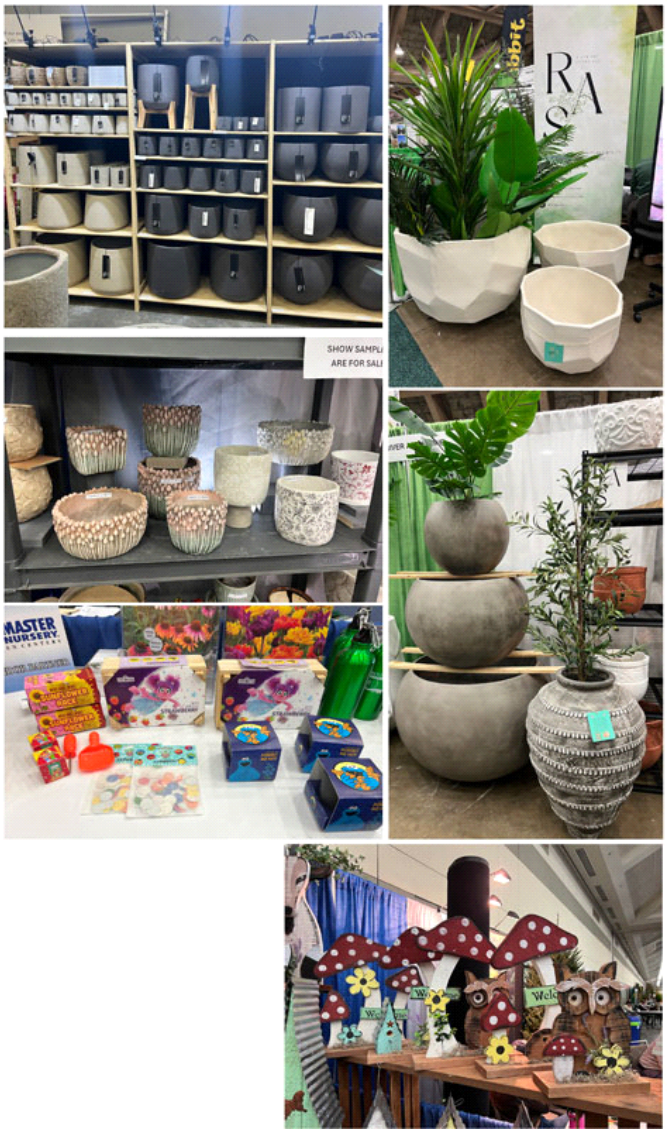
we're 100% willing to seize. Vanilla is an orchid plant, after all, and you can grow this orchid indoors—or even outside if you're in a subtropical climate—simply by attaching it to some bark or moss-covered board (or in a Vina Planter, perhaps?). Oh, and you don't even need pollinators—Sunshine State is self-pollinating! Blooms begin at about two to three years of age. We bakers are willing to wait!

How does this foliage plant solve a problem? That's easy—it solves the problem of "I want more plants!" Sansevieria Hahnii Golden Wendy from **Biostok Foliage** is a compact variety of sansevieria and features fairly wide yellow stripes along its green, strap-like leaves. And the coolest part is its whorled, rosette form! It's habit is (to me) way more whorled than other Hahniis out there. Golden Wendy is a sansevieria for collectors and general plant lovers alike.

MANTS

by Jennifer Zurko

Although the Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show (MANTS) leans toward the wholesale nursery and landscape folks, there are a good number of products that IGCs would take interest in. Here are a couple of things I thought would be ideal for retail.



Grays (dark and light) continue to be popular in pottery and containers, although I'm starting to see more color and unique patterns. Debbie Johnson from **Pottery Pots** said that they've noticed younger customers lean toward more neutral colors. And different textures are definitely in—which, as a touchy-feely person, I appreciate.

I love the designs of the pots in the Buds & Blooms collection from **Mick's Picks**. Mickey Heintzelman (the Mick in Mick's Picks) said she's seeing people gravitate toward more color in pots, showing how important it is to have variety for customers!

Speaking of unique patterns and textures, **River Art Stone** made their MANTS debut this year with their eye-catching containers. Every pot is hand-made in Turkey with crack-proof and frost-proof reinforced glass fiber concrete, and can be shipped anywhere in the world. They have a bunch of different sizes, with a light-weight option for the large containers. I asked what they've noticed with regards to trends and they said they base their designs on what their customers want—they can provide any size and texture in an "endless color palette." And each design is named after historical places in the Middle East.

De Vroomen, a hardgoods and bulb distributor, is celebrating their 100th anniversary this year and one of their new programs is a line of gardening products for kids featuring characters from "Sesame Street." There are little kits with

pots and seeds, plus confetti embedded with seeds you can actually plant in the ground. That would be perfect if you have a kid with a spring birthday—hold the party in the garden and there's no cleanup!

It may have been only the third year **Woodland Country Creations** has been at MANTS, but Joseph King has been designing and creating wooden garden décor since he was 14 years old. He and his Uncle Amos (who was with Joseph in his booth for moral support) started with a few designs and a couple of handsaws. Now, Joseph has a two-story shop in his Amish community in Pennsylvania with a staff of friends and family who help make his products that he ships all over the country.

Each piece is hand-made of wood and metal for IGCs, gift shops and online re-wholesalers. Being Amish, Joseph isn't online himself, but he has a mailing list where he sends his catalogs three times a year and does send email blasts (with the help of a tech-savvy friend). The best way to get on the list to see everything that Woodland Country Creations offers is by calling (717) 529-4010. **GP**