

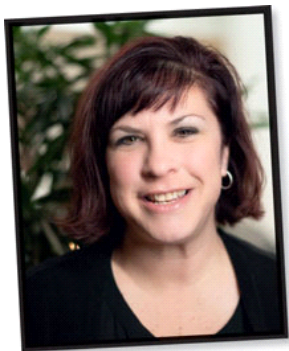
GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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It's All in the Presentation

Jennifer Zurko



JENNIFER ZURKO

As editor, my job is to know about all of the content that's generated out of this well-oiled (mostly) machine called Ball Publishing. This not only includes the magazine you're currently reading, but our other printed pieces (three supplements and our *Inside Grower* magazine), all 10 of our newsletters, and the loads of other digital content we produce with our videos, podcasts, live streams, audio files and social media.

It's a lot. And I can't claim to be 100% on top of everything 100% of the time. But there's always something that we put out to the masses that sticks with me for a time.

The most recent example is one of Jake Holley's *Inside Grower* newsletters. Jake is a research scientist at Colorado State University and the newest editor-at-large on our newsletter staff. His expertise is in controlled environment agriculture (CEA), so when our last editor had to bow out of being a Ball Publishing contributor, we were lucky to have found Jake.

In one of his last newsletters, he talked about a recent bit Jimmy Kimmel had on his show. Apparently, there's a very high-end strawberry from Japan called Elly Amai that you can only find in luxury grocery store Erewhon in Los Angeles where a single strawberry costs \$20. Jimmy Kimmel's team re-packaged regular ol' strawberries from American producer Driscoll and gave them to unsuspecting people to see if they noticed the difference.

Of course they didn't notice a difference. They thought it was the best strawberry they'd ever eaten. Not because it was, but because the high-end packaging told them it was supposed to be.

In Jake's opinion, there's both a negative and positive takeaway to Jimmy Kimmel's unscientific experiment.

"The downside: many of the value-added traits we work hard to develop in the industry (better flavor, richer color, crunchier texture) often go unnoticed by consumers," he wrote. "The upside? The baseline quality of our produce is already exceptional and deserves to be celebrated."

I loved that perspective and thought it could apply to another commodity that consumers often take for granted: the ubiquitous poinsettia.

I mean, think about it—people know and expect there to be poinsettias in almost every store they frequent once Halloween is over. It's a given, and they also expect them to be cheap.

But what if we packaged them in such a way that we could charge more for them? Or at the very least, get people really excited about them?

Like, selling a single poinsettia in a sleeve made of gold. Or in a Waterford crystal pot. Or a poinsettia flocked with dust ground from Swarovski diamonds. I mean, it's all in the presentation, right?

Okay, all of this is ridiculous, but so is paying \$20 for one strawberry.

But it gets you thinking about other ways we could present poinsettias. It's easy to get lost in the process of choosing new cultivars, ordering the cuttings, growing them, sleeving them and getting them out the door. When I was at the N.G. Heimos Poinsettia Open House last fall, there was talk about how we could use poinsettias as cut flowers for winter bouquets, especially the winter rose and Princettia types. I'd never heard that before, and maybe it'll turn out to be too much of a stretch to really work. But why not try it? Any ideas on how to present poinsettias are worth exploring. And all the blood, sweat and tears you put into producing poinsettias deserves to be celebrated.

So this month, we celebrate the ever-popular, always-expected poinsettia, just in time for when your cuttings will be arriving and you have to switch gears from spring and summer production to fall and winter.

According to Lois Beckett, the food critic from *The Guardian*, a spokesperson from that grocery store in L.A. said they can't keep the Elly Amai strawberry in stock, they're so popular. She questioned whether it signaled the worst of American excess or whether it's just that delicious, so she and a couple of colleagues tried one. After struggling to pick the best one from a shelf crowded with single strawberries ("It felt like less a supermarket purchase than the start of a relationship."), they tasted a slice of the Elly Amai strawberry along with a "control" of Driscoll strawberries.

After letting the strawberry reach the recommended room temperature (seriously—they say to do that), the group determined that it was indeed delicious. And that the Driscoll strawberries were fine—some in the clamshell were better than others. But the Elly Amai strawberry also made them feel a little sad. It made them think of all the poor little strawberries that didn't make the cut along the way.

"The more we ate, the more unsettled we felt: there was something uncanny about the flavor of the \$20 strawberry, as if the process of perfecting a natural thing had been pushed past the point of human enjoyment."

The Elly Amai strawberry is definitely on the list when it comes to unnecessary excess. And you don't even really enjoy eating it. At least a fancy poinsettia flocked with real diamonds would be nice to look at. **GT**