It’s shopping season, plus employees’ next steps and scholarship monies



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Green Profit's buZZ

Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

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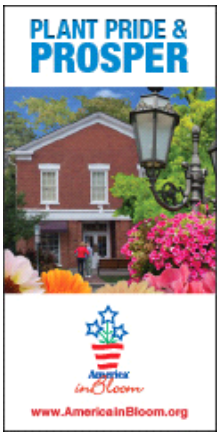
We're On the Ground

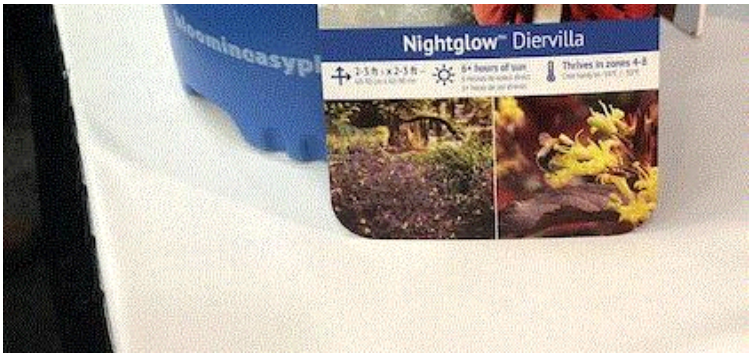
Show season has begun, and Ball Publishing has folks out in the field, digging up news and product info you can use. This week, we have people in Maryland and Georgia for MANTS and the AmericasMart Atlanta, respectively. Emailing both folks with "What are you seeing?" started a cavalcade of product pics streaming into my inbox.

First, MANTS. BP's Kim Brown has sent along two products so far. The first is a tag for the Bloomin' Easy brand from Van Belle Nursery.









Notice how the plant photos aren't necessarily front and center, but the person holding a phone is. Van Belle's Kevin Cramer told Kim a survey of their younger customers revealed that they prefer the more lifestyle-focused tag. The message Bloomin' Easy is promoting is the option to sign up for care reminders. As Kim told me, they don't send reminders every day (totally annoying) but just three or four time a year on topics like watering, trimming, fertilizing—that sort of thing. They believe a supported customer, especially a first-timer, is more likely to become a long-term customer.

Kim's second item is something from Jiffy called the 70mm Carefree Pellet. It's essentially a compressed pellet (the kind that Jiffy is famous for) that expands into a sort of baggie made out of biodegradable PLA netting. Jiffy's Kent Carrell told me it's much like tea bag material. The closed-bottom bag is filled with a mix with natural amendments and is both easy to plant in and easy to plant out for consumers. The closed bottom means no escaping soil during transport and on the bench, plus it dries slower in the retail environment.



Jiffy's Carefree Pellet in compressed form ...



... and expanded.



And From Atlanta …

Green Profit's Jen Polanz is scouring the floor—multiple floors, in fact—at AmericasMart, probably where a good portion of you or your colleagues are at the current moment. Jen found so many things she liked, she didn't know which to choose! But choose, she did. Here's what she had to say:

"After my first day at the gift show in AmericasMart, I've been able to discern some trends. One, there's not nearly as many garden retailers here as there have been in the past—at least, not yet. It's still early in the show, so let's allow for that. Judging by my discussions and by viewing products, when it comes to fun, whimsical gifts, mermaids, unicorns and llamas are still pretty hip with the kids. One vendor told me sloths are getting trendy, too, so watch out for them.



“Here's just one of many, *many* products I saw today. I picked the Vase Candle from Bedrock Tree Farm because the company has a cool story, and the candle itself smells like Christmas. Owners Tom and Angie Geary planted a 12-acre Christmas tree farm in Wakefield, Rhode Island, in 1996 after an oil spill reduced Tom's work as a full-time lobsterman. They started creating fir needle powder from the trees, which went first into a line of soap and bath products and then into their candles.

“The Vase Candle, a three-wick, 32-oz. candle, burns for about 150 hours and is made of 100% non-GMO soy. It smells just like a Christmas tree. You can find more information about the company at BedrockTreeFarm.net, and keep watching the *Green Profit* Facebook page and magazine for more products from the show!”

Thanks, JP! And folks, do what she says. Join the other AmericasMart shoppers over on our newly revitalized *Green Profit* Facebook page.



For Your Veg Gardening Customers

Vegetable gardening season starts as soon as this year’s seed catalogs arrive. I’ve got two veg-related items for you from small companies who both took an interesting route to get off the

ground.

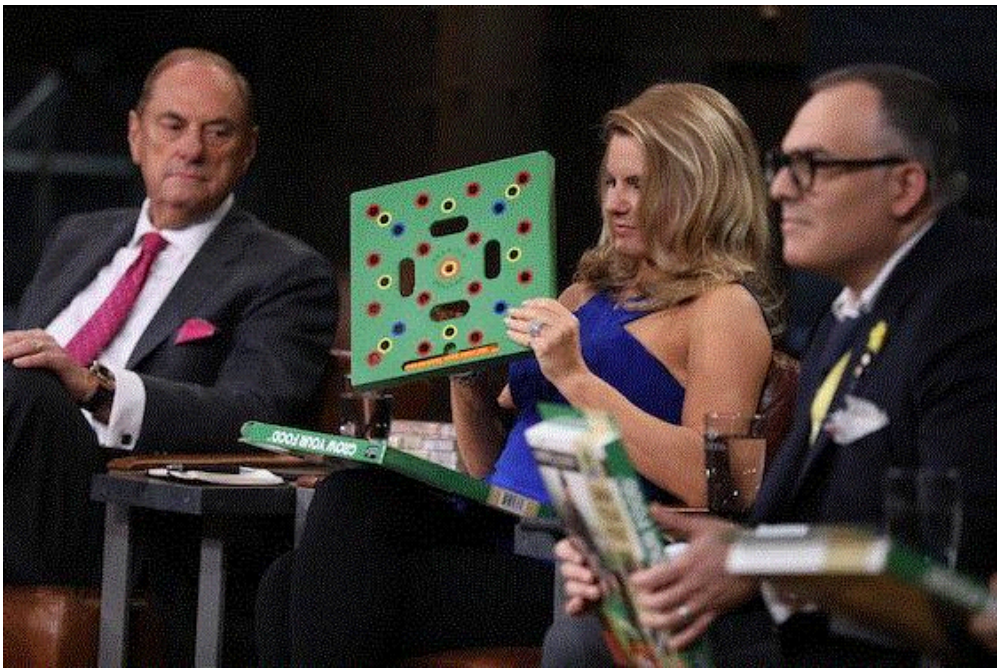
The first is Vermont-based Seedsheets. I hadn't heard of the 4-year-old company until I received a press release announcing their newest product line (inferring that they had older product lines). Seedsheets' products are, as you may guess from the name, sheets of water-permeable fabric embedded with slightly flattened pods containing seeds. These sheets fit varying sizes of grow bags for indoor and outdoor use and even versions large enough to cover the surface of a standard rectangular raised bed. They've seeded these sheets with veggies that go together to make a dish, such as the Taco Kit, the Caprese Kit and even the Pickling Kit. Fun!



Mini Sheet Kits, Seedsheets' latest product line.

Their newest product line is the Mini Sheets, which are meant for growing on countertops and windowsills. Herb, salad and pesto seed combos can be grown by anyone, anywhere, the release claims. The kits come with the growbag-like container and a custom-designed watering spout that looks like it fits over a soda bottle. Curiously, Seedsheets offers some sort of technology allowing the gardener to opt in for text updates from their garden, sending them messages about watering and other tips for being successful. That must have been one of the reasons they received $50,000 worth of funding from their appearance on Shark Tank a couple years ago. Check them out at www.seedsheets.com.

Last September, I told you about the Surrey, BC-based Seeding Square, a product I saw while at the CanWest Hort Expo. You can read my bit about it in this archived *Buzz*, and you can read their own story HERE. They, too, are going the reality TV route for funding, participating in the Dragon's Den, the Canadian version of Shark Tank.



The Seeding Square being checked out on the set of Dragon's Den.

Did they receive funding? You'll find out January 31 when their episode airs on CBC Television. Our Canadian friends will have to let us know what happens.



Who's Ready for an Upgrade?

Maybe what you're looking for is a little bigger than what can fit on a tradeshow or gift mart floor. How many of you need some extra or upgraded growing or retailing space? You know how it goes: You stay so long in one structure, growing in a space a little more crowded than it should be and allowing customers to brush by each other a bit too closely. But you stick with it because A) it's familiar and B) change is uncomfortable sometimes. I get it.

Consider what the Master Gardeners of Yakima County (Washington) did. They finally realized they needed an upgrade of their existing, barely operational greenhouse.

That's where Growers Supply came in. With their help, the Yakima County Master Gardeners upgraded to a GrowSpan Series 1000 Double Bay greenhouse with environmental controls that make it a comfortable space to work in year-round. It's like finally realizing you've spent enough time and money on an old car and need to trade it in. Maybe 2019 is the year you do that for your structures, too.



Much More to Master

Round about this time every year, I make it a point to include information about employer-employee relations, hiring practices and general “how to work with people” tips. Since it’s not quite time to ramp up the hiring of seasonal employees, let’s talk about the employees already on staff.

I came across this great *Business Insider* article about how to handle employees who may be looking for their next steps in their careers. Sarah Wagener, the Chief People Officer for DoorDash and a veteran of other online companies, says she begins conversations with upward-looking employees with the question, “Do you believe you’ve mastered your current role?” She says the typical answer is no. Not only have employees rarely had a conversation about their shortcomings in their current positions, Sarah says, but she finds they appreciate the time and space to have those conversations.

Some other points that stood out for me in the article include:

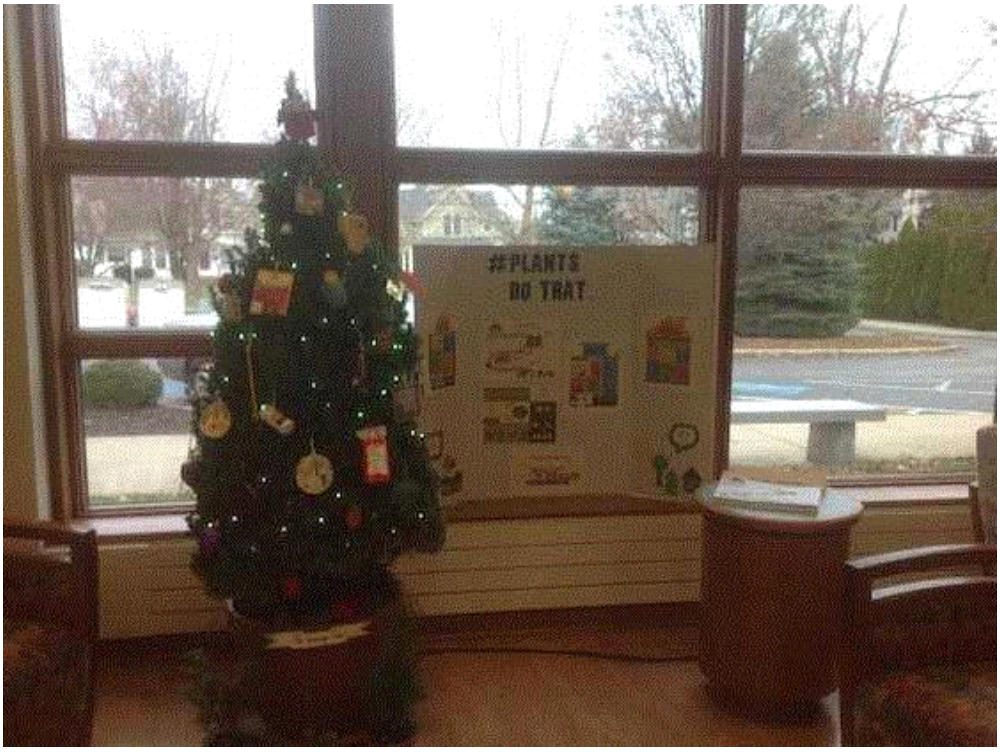
- **Talk about failure.** It’s a particularly good way to manage Millennials. Lots can be learned from failure.
- **That goes for employees, too.** Managers can’t help if they don’t know you are struggling or have hit a roadblock.
- **Embrace weaknesses.** Addressed adequately, weaknesses become strengths.

Conquer what you have. Maybe employees’ career goals should not immediately be upward, but mastering the positions they already hold.

The Learning Tree

Speaking of employees, Cathy Kowalczyk at Willoway Nurseries in Ohio wrote in to explain a community outreach project their employees took on this year. It was their second-annual Christmas tree decorating contest. Each department was given a potted Alberta spruce to decorate as they wanted. The trees were then donated to various places around their community—nursing and veterans’ homes, shelters and so forth. Not only do these recipients get a decorated tree, but they can also plant it come spring.

But—here's the innovation that Cathy's greenhouse department came up with: They decorated the tree with a "Plants Do That" theme. "Plants Do That," as you recall, is a recent industry initiative that educates the public about all the groovy things plants—including trees—can do for us.



Cathy calls this year's tree a learning tree, and—long story short—they donated the tree and an accompanying "Plants Do That" display to the local library where patrons can read all about what plants do. While installing the tree at the library, Willoway was able to sign on to offer a children's program in the future about plants. Win-win!

As an aside, I learned that Willoway Nurseries has "Culture Teams" within each department. Team members get together to brainstorm ways to improve their departments and anything that affects the culture of the company. They also look for ways the company can support their community. As Cathy put it, "The Culture Teams are a way to get all employees involved in running the company, being proud of what they do and making it a great place to work."

Sustainable Solutions?

Does your inbox have the pleasure of receiving my biweekly *Tropical Topics* e-newsletter? If so, you would have read my Q&A with Brian and Emily Kellett, owners of the houseplant-focused retail shops called Stump. I had asked them what they would request from a horticulture industry genie who could grant their wishes. Their answer? Help them be eco-friendlier. That means limit the amount of plastic and waste. I'm sure many of you have had the same wish.

In addition to the Jiffy product mentioned above, Danny Takao has been keeping me appraised of efforts to create a biodegradable, retail-appropriate Ellepot. He just got back from the Ellepot factory in Denmark where they've been working on Grobags, a retail version of the plantable fabric, open-ended Ellepot.



“These are big Ellepots with sealed bottoms for better handling at retail,” Danny explained in an email. A complaint from some grower-retailers is the open-ended design was too messy for customers. They are hoping that sealing the bottom alleviates that issue. They are also thinking of a creating a sleeve that would slip over the Grobag for labeling and product information. Think of a water-resistant version of the sleeve that fits around a hot cup of coffee. Any thoughts on the design challenge and solution? Send them MY WAY.

Money and Experience

Students, do you need money and/or experience to continue your horticultural career path? If so, I’ve got numerous opportunities for you. They are:

The AmericanHort HortScholars Program. They are now seeking “enthusiastic students” in hort-related programs in any degree level. HortScholars spend seven days in Columbus, Ohio, during the week of Cultivate. You get tons of opportunities to meet with industry heavyweights as well as event experience. Visit AmericanHort.org/Scholars to complete your application by March 1, 2019.

American Floral Endowment (AFE) Paid Internships. Pardon me if I’ve already announced these, but a repeat of information is always a good thing for students, right? You’ve got your choice of the Mosmiller Intern Scholarship (for careers in retail or wholesale operations) and the Vic & Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship for students pursuing a career at a commercial production greenhouse or nursery. Both offer some good money and great experience. Find out more about

the AFE internships at endowment.org/internships/. Do so before the March 1 deadline!

Bryson L. James Scholarship. A new scholarship from SNA's Sidney B. Meadows Scholarship Fund, the Bryson L. James Scholarship, honors Bryson L. James, who was the director of horticultural research for SNA. Find out more about this new scholarship and all the other scholarships available thanks to the Sidney B. Meadows Scholarship Fund HERE. You'll also find information there on how you can help fund the new Bryson L. James Scholarship. Oh, and there's also a March 1 deadline on those, too.

Finally …

I just found out that January 10 is National Houseplant Day. It's the one day you can wear a syngonium on your head and get away with it without looking silly.



Well, nearly.

If you have comments, questions or suggestions, let me have 'em at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



Ellen Wells

Editor-at-Large
Green Profit

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