

# Altman Buys Color Spot; Hugging a Syngonium; PW Impressions



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### COMING UP THIS WEEK:


- Correction: MANTS is on NOW
- No. 2 becomes No. 1
- It's Houseplant Appreciation Day
- Meet the new bosses
- UN's Intl. Year of Plant Health
- IGE buys Midwest's bench biz
- PW makes 2 billion impressions
- Higher education conference
- See "The Mule"
- Finally ...



**Correction: MANTS is NOW, not next week**

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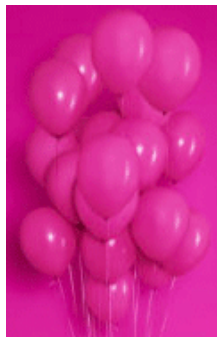
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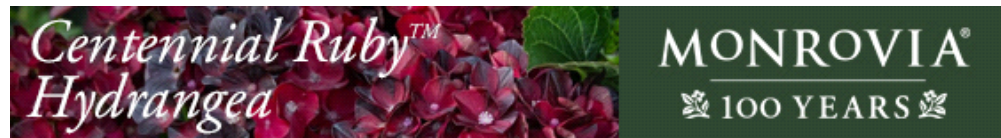
GROWERTALKS  
2016 FEBRUARY 4

My apologies for getting the MANTS dates wrong in the last newsletter. I hope and pray that nobody made the decision to attend based on my feeble recommendation and has made travel plans for next week. (Thankfully, colleague Kim Brown didn't, and she's on the trade show floor as we speak!)

I made the gaffe because there's a show in Virginia by a very similar name (Mid-Atlantic Horticultural Short Course) and when I glanced at [hortcalendar.com](http://hortcalendar.com) for the MANTS dates, that's what caught my eye.

MANTS is right now, January 9-11; MAHSC is a week later, January 15-17.

My sincere apologies! As great a tool as [hortcalendar.com](http://hortcalendar.com) is, one still has to read it correctly for it to be effective. I will be more careful next time.

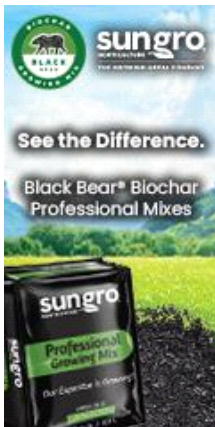
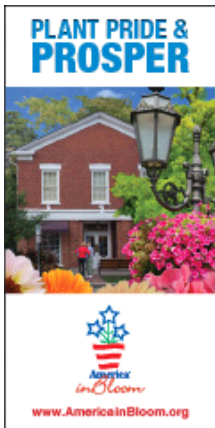


### No. 2 buys No. 1 and becomes No. 1

I can admit when I'm scooped, because I'm happy to give credit where credit is due (and because it doesn't happen very often): *Greenhouse Grower* magazine has reported that Altman Plants, formerly No. 2 on their Top 100 Growers Survey, has purchased the assets of former No. 1 Color Spot Nurseries from Wells Fargo, the creditor that stepped in to keep the bankrupt California-based nursery from going into liquidation. The deal was closed December 21.



Deanna and Ken Altman in 2016, when I visited with them for the cover story of the *December GrowerTalks* "Fast

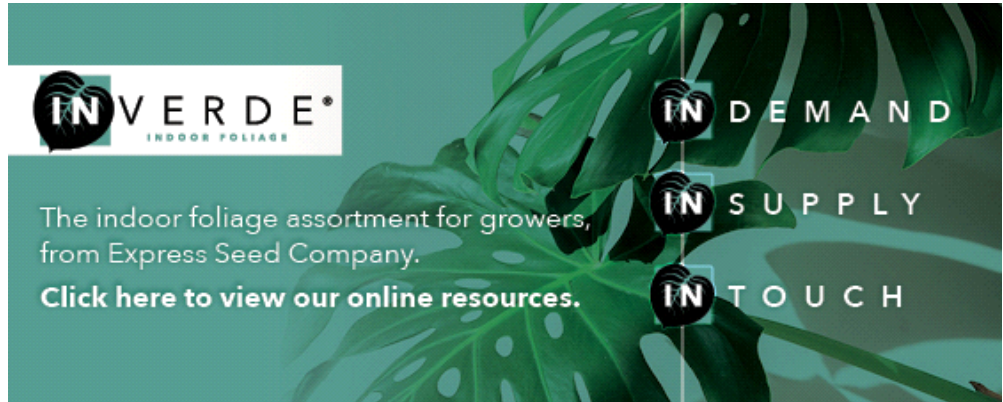


Company" issue.

Ken Altman told *Greenhouse Grower* that his company will acquire three Color Spot locations in California (Fallbrook, Salinas and Lodi) and five in Texas (Troup, San Antonio, Waco, Walnut Springs and Fort Davis). All but one (the former Lone Star Growers in San Antonio) will be renamed Altman Plants. Operations and sales at each location will continue as before, he said.

That gives Altman more than 38 million sq. ft. (872 acres) of covered growing space and 3,600 acres of field production, making them the largest nursery operation in America by a comfortable margin.

I've got two questions for Ken: "Why?" and "How will you not let this sudden massive expansion screw up what you've already built?" I'll share the answers as soon as I get them.



## Happy Houseplant Appreciation Day!

What? You've never heard of it? Well, now you have. It's every January 10. Put it in your calendar now, and set it on repeat occurrence.



Have you hugged your syngonium today? I have. Hope the other 100 plants in my garden room aren't jealous.

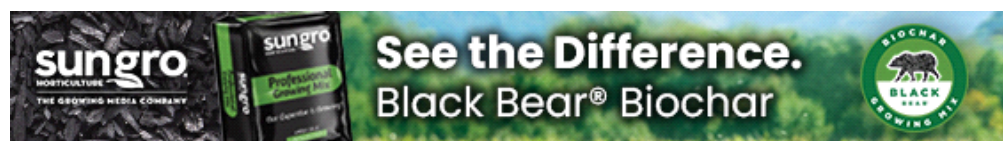
Okay, it's not a legal holiday complete with closed banks and a day off (wouldn't that be cool!). Nor is it recognized by Congress with a proclamation written in an olde English font. It was actually launched by the Gardener's Network ([gardenersnet.com](http://gardenersnet.com)) with two objectives: to remind people after the holidays that their forgotten houseplants need a little attention; and to celebrate beneficial houseplants and to encourage growing houseplants.

Good goals! And yes, after the lights and sparkle and greenery of the holidays are put away, our homes can be a bit drab and lifeless. Now's the perfect time to bring home a new houseplant, as well as give some care to our existing ones.

Here are some houseplant ideas for your customers from the Gardener's Network. Feel free to share on your company's social media pages or in-store:

- Start by making sure that the houseplants you already have, are well watered
- Next, give them a special treat today... a little fertilizer
- If you do not have any houseplants, or just have a couple, buy a new houseplant (or two) on this day
- Learn more about the [benefits of houseplants](#) to your health
- Stand by your houseplant and breathe in the air! It's giving off oxygen ... just for you!
- Teach your kids about growing and caring for plants
- Give a houseplant to a friend, especially the elderly or shut-ins
- Talk to your plants. Yes, people believe plants respond positively when you talk to them
- Most of all, have fun and enjoy a long winter day spending quality time with your houseplants

Personally, I'll admit that I talk to my plants. All 150 of them, or whatever the latest count is. I figure it can't hurt. (I also give my trees a hearty thump with my hand, like you would a big dog, when I'm mowing, but that's another topic.)



## Meet the new bosses

Hopefully not the [same as the old bosses](#) ... unless the old bosses were great, of course. Which is my way of saying there's been some leadership changes at a couple of well-known horticultural firms. Here's who's who:

At [McHutchison Horticultural Distributors](#) and [Vaughan's Horticulture](#), Keith Cable will assume leadership of both divisions. Keith was president of Vaughan's, which he helped [relaunch](#) in 2013. That promotion for Keith comes following the announcement that Mike Tizio, CEO of McHutchison since 2014, will retire after 37 years at the company.

To help fill gaps in sales and operations, Nathan Lamkey has been appointed Vice President of Sales for both divisions, while Mike Pezzillo assumes the Vice President of Operations role for both.

McHutchison is based in Wayne, New Jersey, while Vaughan's is in Naperville, Illinois.

Meanwhile, out in Mt. Vernon, Washington, Scott Crownover has been named the new President and Chief Executive Officer at [Skagit Horticulture](#). He joined Skagit last year as COO after a stint

as president of the aforementioned McHutchison. Scott will oversee all Skagit divisions, from unrooted to young plants to finished plants, at their four locations in Washington and California.



## 2020 is International Year of Plant Health, says UN

I don't pay much attention to what the United Nations is working on, but when they mention plants, my ears perk up. Apparently they will be focused on them in a big way in 2020 as they name that year The International Year of Plant Health (IYPH)

Now, their focus won't be on pretty annuals and perennials and trees and houseplants and the like; they're taking a much bigger, broader view of the topic, with the goal of "helping to make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable" which will help to "end hunger, reduce poverty, protect the environment and boost economic development to leave no one behind," says the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), which is behind the project.

Mentioned in the proclamation are plant pests, invasive species and climate change. FAO estimates that up to 40% of global food crops, worth \$220 billion, are lost annually due to plant pests. Climate change is one of the emerging challenges for plant health, as it influences the movement of plant pests, and weakens host plants by extreme weather conditions. New pests can be introduced into new ecosystems, with potentially disruptive impacts on agricultural productivity. And the recent rapid movement of invasive plant pest species in different parts of the world that have had a significant impact on food security and livelihoods.

Even though the UN seems to be focused more on food agriculture, the [International Association of Horticultural Producers](#) (AIPH), which supports ornamentals growers worldwide, welcomes the UN's initiative.

"Tackling the spread of plant pests and disease is critical to ensure a vibrant and dynamic plant trade into the future," says Tim Briercliffe, AIPH Secretary General. "It is very much in the interest of growers, as well as the environment, that the best possible plant health systems are in place and consistently applied. That such a prestigious organization recognizes the importance of this area is very positive."

In the past five years, the global ornamentals industry has faced an increasing threat from diseases such as *Xylella fastidiosa*, with parts of Europe particularly affected. Ornamental plants and flowers are grown and traded around the world, making plant health inescapably a global issue and the 2020 IYPH initiative will help raise international recognition and encourage a consolidated approach to protecting plants around the world.

AIPH says it will be undertaking activities and holding events relating to plant health as part of the 2020 IYPH initiative.



## **Innovative Growers Equipment buys Midwest GROmaster's bench business**

Midwest GROmaster, a long-time manufacturer and supplier of ebb and flow benching systems and irrigation equipment to the horticulture industry, has decided to get out of the bench portion of the business to better support its sister companies, Midwest Trading and Midwest Groundcovers.

To do that, they've sold their ebb and flow benches inventory and customer information to a new firm, [Innovative Growers Equipment](#) of Sycamore, Illinois.

Funny, I like to think I know all the manufacturers, especially those in my back yard, but IGE was new to me. Then I noted the source of the press release was Bruce Zierk, a long-time Midwest GROmaster employee and two-time contributor to the Ball RedBook chapter on ebb and flow benches. Aha! So I contacted him for more about this new company.

Bruce explained that a few years ago, he and a Midwest GROmaster colleague, Chris Mayer, noted a rapidly increasing demand for benches, including for the medical cannabis industry, then in its infancy.

"We felt there was room in the industry for another quality growing bench manufacturer," Bruce told me, so they decided to start one that would focus on that new industry (along with traditional greenhouse and nursery operations). Their firm not only makes and installs benches, but also distributes injectors, LED lights and other greenhouse equipment. They started in 2016 and today have 62,000 sq. ft. of production space and about 40 employees on the payroll.



## **PW makes an impression ... 2 billion of them, actually**

I just got a note from [Proven Winners](#) that they had a goal of delivering 1 billion consumer impressions in 2018 via all their myriad advertising methods—print, billboards, radio (terrestrial and Pandora), sponsorships, websites, digital ads and branded containers. Well, they beat that handily, hitting 2 billion consumer impressions, says Director of Marketing Marshall Dirks.

That's a giant number, all funded by the marketing funds that are collected from the sale of Proven Winners plants, which is why we were curious how Proven Winners tallies it across all those outlets. Do they pad it out, like counting two impressions, one for each eye, when I see an

ad?

“We are constantly seeking creative new ways to reach consumers and deliver our brand message,” explains Marshall. “We want to meet them where they live—in online communities, on their daily commute, on the radio and at their mailbox—to help them integrate flowers and plants into their everyday lives.”

Marshall provided a brief rundown of how they count each outlet:

**Print:** The number of homes reached by a publication. (They ignore the 3x sharing rate that publications use to boost their circulation figures.)

**Billboards:** One view per car, based on the most recent traffic figures for the billboard's location.

**Pandora:** The number of times their commercials run between songs.

**Sponsorships** (including PBS television and the Garden Answer YouTube page): One count for each time a piece of advertising or content is shown to their audience.

**Websites:** One count for each unique visitor to one of Proven Winner's many consumer-facing websites.

**Radio:** Based on how many people are typically listening to a given station during the timeframe they are buying.

**Containers:** Based on how many containers are purchased by growers annually. It's assumed each of those pots will wind up in the hands of an end consumer—one impression each.

**Digital ads:** 1 billion impressions purchased from Google, with ads placed throughout the internet, from social media feeds to gaming platforms (“You know, a lot of our customers play Scrabble!” Marshall says).

It's interesting to see where your Proven Winners marketing dollars go. And if you are doing your own advertising, it's interesting to see where you can spend your money and how you might count the number of impressions you're getting.



## If you're interested in higher education ...

... then you may want to attend this year's National Floriculture Forum, scheduled for February 16-17 at the Crowne Plaza O'Hare Hotel and Conference Center near Chicago's O'Hare airport.

This annual event is aimed at academics, but all are welcome to hear the in-depth discussions on challenges facing university educators and programs. A few of the topics:

- Status of the Floriculture Industry in the USA (Dr. Marvin Miller)
- Creative Ways to Attract External Funding (panel discussion)
- Incorporating the Value of Plants and Our Industry into Curricula (Dr. Charlie Hall)
- Surviving into the Next Generation (panel discussion)
- Young Faculty: Challenges and Opportunities (panel discussion)

There will also be some summaries of current floriculture research by graduate students, which should be very interesting.

There's also an optional Saturday morning tour of the Chicago Botanic Garden.

Register by January 23 to take advantage of the discounted hotel rate. Register at <https://concepts.us.com/registration-forum-2019.asp>.

## See “The Mule”

I haven't, but readers recommend the new Clint Eastwood movie starring Clint as an elderly, almost-bankrupt daylily breeder who turns to drug running for his livelihood. It's based on a true story!

Reviewers told me the horticultural scenes, though few, are accurate. Wendy Sherwood says some of the daylily shots were filmed at Blue Ridge Daylilies in North Carolina.

Denise Welker recommends the movie. She wrote, “One thing it did highlight that only horticulturists will probably catch is his ex-wife mentioning how much time he spent with his plants. So many ‘civilians’ do not realize the time that goes into growing living things.”

Ron Kushner of [www.gardentimes.org](http://www.gardentimes.org) called the film “outstanding.” He liked the speech that Clint gave to the daylily convention, and his closing joke, “Why did the horticulturist cross the lobby?” (I'll save the punchline).

And Alice Longfellow says she was pleasantly surprised to find horticulture as the basis of the story. “Clint Eastwood represented our industry well,” she says.

## Finally ...

Where's Chris this time? My busy January travel schedule kicks in with eight days in Florida for visits and TPIE, followed almost immediately by five days in Germany for IPM Essen. Florida will include lots of grower and retailer visits, some in the company of Ellen Wells. Germany won't have that, but the show is so big, I'll be able to bring back loads of ideas. I'll also bring you the winner of the International Grower of the Year Award. In fact, I'll probably put it on Facebook moments after I read the name on the envelope! Time permitting, I'll do my best to bring you almost-live reports from the road with highlights of both trips.

Bon voyage!



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