

# GROWERTALKS

## Inside Look

8/29/2025

## Take the Risks, Ask the Questions

*Jennifer Zurko*



**JENNIFER ZURKO**

I was really looking forward to talking to Isabela Chamorro, this year's winner of the *GrowerTalks*/Ball Horticultural Company Young Grower Award, for this month's cover story, especially after we announced she won during the Unplugged event at Cultivate'25. She was so happy and ... I guess a good word would be triumphant ...? She held up that crystal award up like she just won the Oscar for Best Actress. And I loved every minute of it.

I've done this Young Grower Award thing for 16 years, and let me tell you, meeting and talking to these young professionals never gets old. And when we announce the winner, most of the time you get expressions of shock and lots of smiles, but it's rare you see such an emotional reaction like what we saw when Isabela won. It was pure, true joy and it immediately endeared her to me, even though we'd only chatted a handful of times and I'd just met her in person the month prior. I know everyone else in the room felt that, too.

When you meet Isabela and start to get to know her, you soon learn that she's filled with many surprises. The cute, smiley, bubbly personality complements her drive, determination and fearlessness.

Looking at her, you'd never guess the journey she's taken to get to being in charge of the entire perennials production department at Mahoney's Garden Center. She's had to deal with many obstacles and setbacks. She's had to be patient and flexible. She's had to take bigger risks than others would ever take.

The saying, "Don't judge a book by its cover" certainly applies to Isabela. She's a force to be reckoned with in a sweet, friendly package.

There have been a lot of unknowables in Isabela's life, but she's been able to push those aside every time when she has her mind set on what she wants. She's a motivated person, yes. But she's also a naturally curious person. She asks a lot of questions and her eagerness to learn everything you have to teach her is infectious. I suspect that all of the mentors in her life—her mother, Claudia; her grandfather, Luís; Alex Meneses of Ball's Las Limas production farm; Mike Mahoney, Linda Rocco and Ava Zelenka—all of the people she said have inspired her, probably found themselves really engaged while they've imparted a bit of knowledge to her.

At 32 years old, Isabela has taken the risks and asked the questions to get her where she is today. And the beauty is

she's got her whole life ahead of her, and the passion and determination to carve out the path she wants.

Also this month, we have our yearly Culture Notes section on a handful of new varieties. If you've got questions regarding the ins and outs of producing some of the newer crops.

We also have our annual coverage of the Cultivate show. We have a run-down of Charlie Hall's keynote, our take on the show vibes and, of course, the new and interesting stuff we saw. And you can go over to *Green Profit* to see the Retailers' Choice Awards from the show, too. Those retailers found some good stuff.

And while I was in Columbus to attend Cultivate, a couple of Ball Seed sales reps and I traveled 30 minutes south to check out Green Legacy, a new-ish greenhouse operation owned by Dan Van Wingerden, son of Art Van Wingerden, who used to own ColorPoint Greenhouses before they sold. Dan and his landscape customer EMI just created a 1.5-acre field trial area this year that was quite the draw for Cultivate attendees; it was their second year being part of the Cultivate grower tour. I had a chance to sit down with Dan for a bit to get his backstory and learn about his motivation behind turning a portion of his property into a trials garden. It's a good story—you should read it.

Getting back to Isabela—she mentioned that, when she was in college, no one wanted to work with her on group projects because she asked so many questions. She was embarrassed about it at first, but then she realized that, to her, no question is stupid—she just wants to know and learn stuff.

As a fellow curious question-asker, I can relate.

Here's to staying curious and asking the questions! **GT**