

GROWERTALKS

Features

8/29/2025

Purpose & Positivity

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At Cultivate, a lot of people stopped us to ask how the show was going, and that inevitably led to overall industry thoughts. Between the four of us, we have 111 years in the industry and 84 years attending Cultivate (before that, OFA/Short Course/Ohio), so you could say we have some perspective.

So what did we think of the show?

In a nutshell, it was good! The energy was high, and despite a so-so or even lousy spring season at retail in many regions, the vibe was upbeat. Besides the usual networking and catching up, the sessions were packed, the aisles were full (of attendees and exhibitors), and the events and receptions within show hours and after were as fun as ever. Host AmericanHort did a fabulous job providing education, information and entertainment.

We do think that there's a shift in how companies attend trade shows. Gone are the days of bringing a full team to Columbus for three days. Now, it seems like a few people from each company attend for a day or maybe two. Hotels are expensive. Gas is expensive. Meals are expensive. Time is expensive.

But that's okay. An efficient person/business can get the show done in a day—IF they come with a plan to divide and conquer the aisles. Plenty of exhibitors felt the show went well—even if there was down time on Tuesday. The decision-makers were there, buyers were engaged and discussions were productive.

The state of the industry: Good! ... but be cautious

On Monday morning, Dr. Charlie Hall, AmericanHort's chief economist and all-around industry guru, presented his annual "State of the Industry" report at Cultivate. This year, amidst all sorts of societal craziness, goofy weather, a shifting customer base and all the uncertainty we're reminded of everywhere we turn for news, Dr. Hall's message was positive. However, it was also fringed with caution and a bit of "wait and see."



Charlie shared all sort of indicators from various sources, discussed recent federal bills and decisions, and concluded that recession in 2026 is NOT imminent. That's good!

Backing up to the start of his talk, Charlie took the standing-room-only audience through the past year for greenhouse producers, looking at total sales, profits, units sold and more. The numbers were excellent: 78% of growers reporting were up year-to-date compared with 2024; 98% of greenhouses were up compared to the pre-pandemic 2019 levels. Net profits YTD are up quite a bit, as well. In terms of units, 50% are up and 50% are down YTD—meaning prices are up but the number of units going out the door are not up as much. Charlie had spent the last two years advising everyone to raise prices, so it seems like folks listened.

When Charlie turned his attention to retail sales (IGC and big box), the story was quite different. As reported by The Garden Center Group, revenue YTD was up only 0.3% and both transaction counts and customer counts were down. On the flip side, average sale was up almost 2%. Two of the three major box stores (no more detail on this ...) were up YTD, but not by much. Post-pandemic growth continues for lawn and garden, and retailers are up quite a bit compared with 2019, but the boom has plateaued. Charlie showed regional breakouts for this data and there's no doubt unfavorable spring weather played a huge role in limiting growth. Forecasts for consumer spending has been rising for the past few years, but looks to be flattening.

Looking at supply and associated costs, Charlie explained that there was a significant amount of buying (by businesses) that occurred before tariffs took effect and this inventory is in place and will be sold without major cost increases ... but when it runs out, expect costs to go up because prices for your suppliers are going up. He said that the cost of goods (inputs) required to run green industry businesses can be expected to rise as little as 5.2% if tariffs don't go too high or are reversed or as much as 9% if they go to plan and remain in place.

In the short term, Charlie seemed positive and advised the audience to take advantage of what you can, now, because current government actions could benefit our businesses greatly. But, of course, things are changing quickly, so keep your finger on the pulse and be ready to pivot if necessary. He applauded our industry for learning a lot through the pandemic about the need to develop a diverse supply chain, our success keeping the almost 20 million new gardeners that walked through retail doors, and effectively raising prices.

Charlie ended with two final takeaways/challenges for all green industry businesses: Manage capital/stay agile and manage your relationships closely—with suppliers and customers.

Automation/technology



Much of the tire-kicking on the trade show floor revolved around labor-savings and efficiency (since good employees aren't getting any less rare or less expensive). Here are a few that Bossman Beytes stuck his head into:

Flier's upgraded filler

The Dutch company's new inline filler offers tremendous capacity for pots (up to 16 in. or flats/trays (running through either lengthwise or sideways, depending upon the belt you specify). Two drums for compacting and a brush for finishing assure consistent fill. And for any soil that doesn't make it into a pot, the return system feature belt instead of an auger for

more capacity, less waste and more safety for workers. Speed is said to be more than enough to keep up with any transplanters or other equipment. Price starts at \$55,000.



TTA's Singulator

TTA (now TTA/ISO) made news when they introduced their cutting sticker, called Cutting Edge. But what it didn't have was a good singulator. Now it does. The singulator is what separates piles of cuttings into individual cuttings the machine can see and grab. TTA developed an array of "linear-activated pneumatic nozzles," which send a pool of air through a mesh belt to dislodge the piles. It's not random; the moving nozzles are directed by a camera above. It's fascinating to watch. The idea is that a worker doesn't have to stand there feeding and untangling cuttings; just dump bags of cuttings into the hopper. Cost is \$45,000 ... maybe the cost of said employee for a season of sticking?

AdeptAg production line software

Environmental controls tell you the status of your fans, heaters, vents, curtains, pumps and so on, but what about your potting and transplant lines? AdeptAg has solved that by developing "smart production monitoring" via the app AdeptAg +. It lets you monitor all your production equipment—soil mixing, filling, transplanting, sticking, you name it—from an app on your desktop, mobile or phone. You can track productivity, see what's running and what's down, even monitor maintenance schedules. It's an agnostic system, letting you connect most any brand of equipment. Now, it doesn't let you control your machines remotely ... but that's coming, they said.

Juniper from Wadsworth

You may know the Step 50 and Step 500 controllers from Wadsworth? They were workhorse environmental controls in many greenhouses literally for generations and plenty are still in service. Juniper represents a whole new generation of Wadsworth step/stage controller that is both budget-friendly (\$3,000 to start) and future-ready (upgradable to some of the capabilities of a serious integrated controller like Wadsworth's Seed). It can control four cooling and two heating stages with three setpoint periods; has two outputs for vents or curtains; offers graphs for equipment data; 30 days of history (unlimited history with wadsworth.cloud); and features a user-friendly interface with desktop and mobile accessibility. That's third-generation CEO Patricia Dean showing it off.

Livegoods



Lots new from Monrovia

The woody and perennials supplier had a lot to talk about this year. The first was about their brand-new liner program called Strong Starts. All of their current genetics moving forward will be available in three liner sizes: Ready & Rooted (P24), Prime Start (P15) and Better Beginnings (P72). They hadn't been formerly selling liners before and the Strong Starts program allows them to offer another form for their customers, especially for landscapers.

Katie Tamony, Monrovia's Chief Marketing Officer, said that brand recognition on the consumer level is strong, but they were looking for a way to carry that up through to the landscape trade. Regional sales manager Mark Hixon agreed. "People know Monrovia and they want to get a piece of it."

Strong Start liners are available out of their facilities in Oregon and California, with the new introduction being added down the road.



Montbretia Dark Fire is called so because of its bright, brilliant red blooms that appear in summer and that the hummingbirds love. The foliage is a smoky purple-green, forming a vigorous clump-forming plant. Hardy to Zone 6.

Carex Fine China is an evergreen grass that grows quickly into a waterfall mound. It blooms but does not seed. Zone 5.

Hebe Surf Break has variegated, creamy yellow-and-green foliage with purple-pink new growth. Soft pink blooms appear in the summer and last until fall. Not a hardy perennial, but would be awesome in containers.

Lastly, next year Monrovia will be celebrating its 100th anniversary, so they gave Cultivate goers a little sneak peek on how they're going to be commemorating this milestone with Centennial Ruby Hydrangea. This is a unique *H. macrophylla* with deep red blooms that darken as they mature to create what Monrovia calls "a dramatic, color-shifting display of blooms."

With strong, sturdy stems that support large blooms that last more than 100 days, it also handles changing weather conditions well. It stays compact, topping out at 3-ft. tall and wide. Its petite size and long-lasting blooms make it perfect as a front border or container plant. And at retail, the first 5,000 plants will include a special tag with a limited-edition number. Zone 4.



New varieties from Van Belle

If you saw the claw-footed bathtub filled with beautiful hydrangeas in the concourse of the convention center, then you saw Van Belle's new Bubble Bath Hydrangea. This Zone-3 H. paniculata features lime-green plumes, but can turn a blush pink in cooler temperatures. It grows 2- to 3-ft. tall and is a vigorous grower, so it doesn't need PGRs. Van Belle's Kevin Cramer said it was so popular at the show that they're almost sold out for next year!

Another new hydrangea, but this time a macrophylla type, is Drama Queen, a re-blooming magenta-pink variety that grows 2- to 3-ft. tall.

Hot Sauce is a Hydrangea paniculata that's hardy to Zone 5, but likes the heat. It's one

of the first of these types to turn from white to pink even in the south.

This silene called Forged By Fire is a native with tidy form and a full bouquet of fiery red flowers on sturdy stems. Kevin said it's loaded in April and May for peak retail season. And it's a pollinator magnet. Hardy to Zone 4.

A brand-new crop for Van Belle are grasses. They've partnered with Intrinsic to include some grasses in their lineup. They're starting with open-market varieties, but they'll eventually have ones that are available exclusively from Van Belle.



Houseplant care from Proven Winners & leafjoy

The brand's houseplant division, leafjoy, won a Retailers' Choice Award for its Climb-Itt poles for indoor plants, but they also introduced two other plant care products in that lineup worth mentioning: Shine-Itt and Feed-Itt. Shine-Itt is a cleaner and conditioner made of all-natural essential oils in a 12 oz. bottle. It's a superfine mist that consumers can spray onto leaves and wipe with a microfiber cloth, and they'll be offering refills that consumers can buy and put into their existing bottles. Feed-Itt is a foliar spray that delivers nutrients to the plant, and it's also made up of all-natural ingredients. It's in a bottle that's the same style as the Feed-Itt, and it has a pleasant smell. Coming soon, too, is Shield-Itt, a protection product.

What's new from Terra Nova Nurseries

Chuck Pavlich, director of new product development at Terra Nova Nurseries, walked through Terra Nova's new introductions. One in particular stood out for cut flowers: Kismet Kiwi Echinacea, which puts out unique-colored blooms on strong stems that are nearly 30-in. tall. The green hue comes from more chlorophyll in its petals (the picture Terra Nova has shows a lighter melon-green than what's seen here—sometimes the lights in the convention center throw off colors).

Chuck said he'd been hearing interest from cut flower growers because it has about a 14-day vase life and the green gets stronger as it ages. It also has a honey-like scent. Other new echinacea intros from Terra Nova include Fringe Festival, a totally sterile plant with the benefit of long-lasting blooms that look fringy, for lack of a better word, and Fried Egg, a shorter, broad and dense plant with unique coloring that prompted its name.



Growing media, irrigation and other inputs



BM 2 Automation – Wood HP Mix from Berger

Berger's new propagation and germination media is a peat and wood fiber mix specially designed to go through automated filling systems to fill small containers (105-cell and larger). Originally developed for the CEA market, this is NOT simply a mix of smaller ingredients. The Canadian peat and engineered wood fibers are blended for the perfect pore size and particle size for optimum air- and water-holding capacity and consistent fill every time.

Dramm's commercial and retail

products

Why leave your nice Dramm hoses strewn across the ground when they now offer a commercial-grade reel for them? Adopted directly from their commercial sprayers, the heavy-duty hose reel offers a stainless shaft, high-flow brass swivel, adjustable safety brake, a wall/column mount that allows for parallel or perpendicular mounting, and a 10 ft. x 3/4 in. lead hose. Capacity is 175 ft. of 5/8 in. hose. Price is just \$299!

Also new from Dramm are single and quad high-flow shut-offs, which join the twin shut-off introduced last year.

And for you retailers with one of those colorful and ubiquitous Dramm watering tool displays, they've reduced the amount of packaging for each product, and what packaging remains includes a QR code that takes your customers right to photos and videos of the product in action.



BioWorks' Principle WP

BioWorks' Technical Services

Director Dr. Carlos Bogran

Principle WP (wetable powder) contains BioWorks' proprietary strain of *Beauveria bassiana* in an optimized formula developed for maximum pest control and remarkably low residue. It's labeled for indoor and outdoor use and is ideal for foliar spray, soil drench, dipping and aerial applications.

Principle WP is labeled for thrips, aphids, whiteflies, beetles, caterpillars, crickets, grasshoppers, leafhoppers, planthoppers, flies, mealybugs, plant bugs, and psyllids. The mode of action is penetration and infection of the target pest cuticle, effectively reducing the risk of insecticide resistance to zero. It has a 4-hour REI; is OMRI-listed; is labeled for vegetables, nursery crops, ornamentals, fruits, vines, hemp and more; and is compatible with conventional pesticides and other biological products.



Dysun's Remix container line

With all the tariff talk, one thing that growers and retailers are concerned about is the cost of decorative pots. Dysun has a new line of containers called Remix that aren't ceramic, so they're exempt from tariffs. However they're made of less plastic, so they're cost-effective while also being sturdy. They come in all sorts of shapes and designs, including a powder finish that look like they could be made out of ceramic

materials. Custom designs are also available. Made at their factory in China and then sold out of their distribution centers in North America. **GT**