

# GROWERTALKS

## Inside Look

9/30/2025

### The '80s Prepared Us For Robots

*Jennifer Zurko*



**JENNIFER ZURKO**

I was in first grade when “The Terminator” came out, so I didn’t see it until middle school, around the same time “Robocop” was in theaters. For some reason, Hollywood was obsessed with robots in the '80s. Some that come to kill you (like “The Terminator”), some that are kinda dumb and sweet and make friends with your dog (like “Short Circuit”).

It’s funny that a lot of those movies looked toward “the future” and what they envisioned hasn’t necessarily come to pass. The plot of “Blade Runner” starts in 2019 when some androids go rogue and have to be rounded up by Harrison Ford. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s Terminator went to 1984 from 2029—which is only a couple of years away. I haven’t heard if we’re close to creating cyborg assassins, but

I doubt it.

I was reminded of all of those '80s robot movies when we were working on the cover art for this month’s issue. It took me back to my childhood, but the point is to make us look toward the future. Maybe Hollywood was (and still is) obsessed with robots because we as a society are obsessed. We love technology and innovation. We’re inspired by it, amazed by it and also wary of it. We can be entertained by movies and books about technology because we think it’s fun, but also far-fetched.

But some of those ideas are closer than you might think. Did we ever think our whole lives would be in a rectangular device that fits in your jeans pocket? Or that you’d be asking artificial intelligence to update your resume? Or that you can track your teenager without having to resort to implanting a microchip?

Technology makes us smarter in a lot of ways, but it also shows that we have no idea what’s coming. The possibilities are endless and that’s why it’s hard for our human brains to comprehend it.

In this month’s cover story, Chris Beytes delves into how close—and far—we are to having a fully autonomous greenhouse where everything is completely controlled by a computer. For a number of years, researchers from around the world have competed in the “Autonomous Greenhouse Challenge,” attempting to grow crops without any human intervention. Wageningen University in the Netherlands has been operating a small research greenhouse autonomously for a couple of years, which they say proves it can be done—but also that there’s a long way to go.

Along the same vein of using modern solutions, our friends at BioTherm provided some guidance on options to heat your greenhouse beyond traditional unit heaters and boilers. On the flipside of that, if you're looking to save on some energy, you can finish some of your spring crops on the cooler side. I talked to Ball Seed's Josh Henry for some best practices and advice. I also include a list of some specific varieties you can finish with lower temperatures.

We also have a lot of great columns this month. I'm happy to introduce Davy Wright of Wright's Nursery & Greenhouse as a new contributor to our staff.

We have Albert Grimm's column about not using fear and overconfidence as approaches to pest management. Paul Pilon discusses irrigating in the fall. Grower Trudy Watt looks back at what was accomplished during the spring and summer and ahead to what winter will bring. Ilyin Costello, one of Ball's summer interns this year, tells us what he learned. And Lowell Halvorson's Field Notes addresses the significance of Selena Red Chrysanthemum ('tis mum season, after all).

If we ever get to the point where the autonomous greenhouse becomes commonplace, I hope that those smart researchers also start working on the autonomous house cleaner. The Roomba can only do so much.

Happy fall!