GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

2/27/2026

# In Memoriam: Ludwig Kientzler

*Chris Beytes*

A pioneer of international floriculture and the vegetative plant market, Ludwig Kientzler—third-generation patriarch of his family's business, Kientzler Young Plants—passed away January 4 at the age of 79.

Born in 1946 in post-war Germany as the eldest son of Ludwig and Else Kientzler, he learned horticulture first-hand by working in the family nursery along with his younger brother, Helmut (who passed away in 2018) and sister, Iris. The sudden death of Ludwig, Sr. galvanized the will of his widow to preserve and expand the family nursery for her three still very young children, so she set up a new location in nearby Gensingen. This difficult period nurtured Ludwig Kientzler's independent nature and his striving for perpetual change; even at a young age, he was very much involved in the expansion of the Kientzler company.

A few highlights from Ludwig's career include the introduction of Paradise New Guinea Impatiens, which he bred to be an improvement over the earlier hybrids. The series took the bedding plant world by storm and is still successful in the marketplace.

As the vegetative plant market grew more global in the 1980s, new plant diseases from abroad appeared—a major challenge for young-plant suppliers. Ludwig set the groundwork for a testing program for phytopathogenic diseases—beginning with the most popular new crops, but then expanding to include all crops in production. Up until this time, such an elaborate clean-stock system for bedding plants had only been applied to pelargonium. The Kientzler subsidiary InnovaPlant was founded in the early 1990s specifically for the elite program, license management, breeding and product development.

Another highlight from Ludwig's career was developing a network of like-minded young plant nurseries that would cover their respective markets and jointly introduce these new crops from clean stock and with solid marketing in place. The culmination of this was the Proven Winners network, the partners of which embraced Kientzler's unique, high-quality genetics.

With the increased demand for their genetics, Kientzler established InnovaPlant de Costa Rica s.a. and later TicoPlant s.a. in order to supply the international Proven Winners network with unrooted cuttings and tissue-cultured plantlets. Under Ludwig's supervision, coffee fields were transformed into 12 hectares of modern greenhouse facilities and a state-of-the-art tissue culture laboratory.

Garry Grüber (who contributed the details of Ludwig's life above), was a long-time employee, colleague and friend of Ludwig's. They met way back in 1987 when Garry was working in the floriculture institute of Geisenheim University.

Garry said via email, "When he found out that my work focus was new ornamentals, plus the added bonus of being multilingual and a U.S. citizen, he rather aggressively tried to recruit me for the Kientzler company… and I eventually relented and took his offer. It was a wild ride indeed after that."

Garry went on to manage the Ecke relationship as the company expanded beyond poinsettias into annuals and was instrumental in helping get the Proven Winners brand off the ground, which Kientzler actively supported with new varieties, clean stock and marketing tools.

Said Garry of Ludwig, "He was my mentor and, in many ways, almost a father-figure to me."

Ludwig's son Andreas is the fourth generation in the family business; his son just came into the business to represent the fifth generation of Kientzler.
Wrote Andreas, "Our utmost goal is to remain as a family business in our industry, being motivated by the great work of the former generations."

Said Garry, "I think that Ludwig and I did indeed live up to that claim in the end." **GT**