GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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HRI Invests $564,521 in New Research

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The Horticultural Research Institute (HRI), the research affiliate of AmericanHort, has announced $564,521 in research funding for 18 projects in 2026, supporting new work designed to strengthen every stage of the horticulture supply chain.

The selected projects address a wide range of industry priorities, including plant propagation and production efficiency, pest and disease management, landscape plant performance, and consumer engagement with horticultural products. Together, the projects reflect the breadth of challenges and opportunities facing growers, landscapers, retailers and allied businesses.

HRI's investments are guided by four strategic research priorities: quantifying plant benefits, creating innovative solutions, gathering consumer insights, and producing practical and actionable solutions. By aligning funding with these priorities, HRI ensures that supported research delivers meaningful benefits to the horticulture industry.

"The projects funded through HRI reflect the industry's commitment to investing in solutions that strengthen horticulture today and into the future," said Mark Yelanich, HRI Board President and Research Director at Metrolina Greenhouses. "When businesses and researchers work together through HRI, the results benefit the entire green industry."

The HRI-supported projects will explore solutions to industry challenges, with a focus on sustainability, efficiency and the overall well-being of the horticultural businesses. As HRI continues to support research, the impact of these projects is expected to extend to all segments of the industry.

- Lean on Me: The Roles of Microbial "Friends" in Ameliorating Root Rot Disease in Rhododendron (Jean Burns, Case Western Reserve University, Ohio)
- Investigate the Rooting-promoting Effect of a Slow-release Synthetic Auxin on Recalcitrant Woody Cuttings (Haiying Liang, Clemson University, South Carolina)
- Transgene-Free by Design: Editing Woody Ornamentals Via Agrobacterium Rhizogenes-induced Roots and TLS-mediated Transcript Mobility (Hongmin Qin, Texas A&M University, Texas)
- AI-enhanced High Fidelity, Multi-stage Nursery Inventory Management of Southern Magnolia Using Intelligent Drones (Patricia Knight, Mississippi State University, Mississippi)

- Optimizing Digital Marketing Strategies for Horticultural Products: Exploring the Role of AI and Personalization in Consumer Engagement and Sales (Juan Mundel, Michigan State University, Michigan)
- Exploring Effective Strategies for Managing Vascular Streak Dieback Using Innovative Chemical Treatments, Biological Agents and Nanomaterial-based Applications (Fulya Baysal-Gurel, Tennessee State University, Tennessee)
- Establishing Micropropagation Systems and Initiating Biotechnological Tools in Redbud (Cercis spp.) (Hsuan Chen, North Carolina State University, North Carolina)
- Using Systemic Insecticides to Protect Container-grown Nursery Plants From Feeding Damage Caused by Redheaded Flea Beetle (Systena frontalis) Adults (Raymond A. Cloyd, Kansas State University, Kansas)
- Accelerating Root Development in Slow-growing Nursery Stock Using Plant Growth Regulators (Kristopher Criscione, Virginia Tech, Virginia)
- Protecting Plant Health: Rapid Molecular Tools for Phytophthora Surveillance in Water Systems (Johanna Del Castillo Munera, University of California-Davis, California)
- Advancing Integrated Management for the Invasive Box Tree Moth (Cydalima perspectalis) With Biological Control, Cultivar Susceptibility and Alternative Chemical Strategies (Alejandro Del Pozo-Valdivia, Virginia Tech, Virginia)
- Innovations for Sustainable Control of High-impact Bacterial Diseases (Jonathan Jacobs, The Ohio State University, Ohio)
- Developing Optimized Micropropagation and Callus Regeneration Systems for Gardenia (Wusheng Liu, North Carolina State University, North Carolina)
- Less Suckers, More Profits: Advancing Sucker Management Tools for Ornamentals (Marcelo Moretti, Oregon State University, Oregon)
- Silencing the Threat: Develop RNAi-based Spray Strategies for Integrated Management of Crapemyrtle Bark Scale (Hongmin Qin, Texas A&M University, Texas)
- Ploidy, Pollinators and Plasticity: Do Polyploid Cultivars Maintain Higher Quality Under Deficit Landscape Irrigation While Still Attracting Pollinators? (Ryan Contreras, Oregon State University, Oregon)
- Magnet Plants: Increasing Pollinator Biodiversity Via Use of Non-native, Ornamental Plants in Gardens (Gail Langellotto, Oregon State University, Oregon)
- Stress Relief, Social Bonding and Consumer Interest Through Plant Gifting and Cooperative Garden Tasks Among Young Adults with Disabilities (Xuan “Jade” Wu, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Texas)

HRI supports research that helps the green industry create healthy, high-performance plants, promote efficient and sustainable production practices, and develop new methods and technologies to benefit the industry.

HRI has provided more than $11 million in funds to research projects covering a broad range of production, environmental and business issues important to the green industry. Over $20 million is committed to the endowment by individuals, corporations and associations. For more information about HRI, its grant-funded research or programming, visit hriresearch.org or contact Jennifer Gray at (614) 884-1155. **GT**