

Five Ideas from Bailey; Ball Customer Day; Where's Chris?



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- Five cool ideas from Bailey:
- Shrubs on a stick
 - Copper
 - Steam
 - Remote-control trimming
 - Air hose door-opener
- Customer Day at Ball
Finally ...

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Five Cool Ideas from Bailey Nurseries

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PLANT PRIDE & PROSPER

Last week, publisher Paul Black and I flew up to Minneapolis/St. Paul for the annual Bailey Nurseries Summer Expo, held every July for the last 15 years. It's an open house for customers and friends, with the usual tours and seminars and lunch. Jen Zurko and other colleagues have attended before, but this was my first time to their Expo, and my first time back to Bailey in probably a dozen years, so I looked forward to the opportunity to hang with the 400 or so other guests from across the upper Midwest.



PR and Communications Specialist Ryan McEnany, our host and son of company president Terri McEnany, gave us press attendees an advanced tour the day before the event to get the lay of the land ... which is considerable, and spread out across several towns. The Bailey Nurseries history goes back to 1905 (the same year George J. Ball started his company, by the way), and you can see the family's impact on the area in how often you see "Bailey" on the street signs, parks, even an elementary school.





At the Expo itself, I picked loads of interesting ideas, but I'll focus on five: one of which is plant-based and four of which revolve around nursery technologies that help improve plant quality or reduce labor.



1. “Shrubs on a stick”

That’s what Product Development Manager Debbie Lonnee jokingly calls standards, or tree-form shrubs, a product line Bailey is doing more of. During her new variety talk, she mentioned tree forms of Berry White *Hydrangea paniculata* and Bloomerang Dark Purple Lilac.

I asked Debbie if these were intended for the landscape or on the patio? She replied that with yards getting smaller, she saw more folks having the opportunity to enjoy small focal-point trees. But she admitted they’re also perfect for summer patio plants, even though most folks will probably throw them away at the end of the season.



What this says to me is that Bailey, a traditional woody producer, is acknowledging an alternative market for their product—as an annual—as the tropical folks have done with hibiscus and mandevilla. (Along those same lines, I noted some hydrangeas in hanging baskets at one of the Bailey homes.)

2. Copper

IPM Manager Jean-Marc Versolato (pictured) showed us Bailey's new "copper fertilization" system, installed by Danish company [Aqua-Hort](#). After a three-year, small-scale test, they were convinced enough of its worth to install a big 600 gpm system this spring to cover all 22 acres of their propagation nursery.



It's a simple system that uses a low-voltage electrical charge running through copper electrodes to put copper ions into the irrigation water. The copper ions carry a positive charge, which attracts negatively charged spores and organic matter. It's not new technology; Aqua-Hort lists major nurseries around the world that are using it.

Jean-Marc explained that the system puts about 3 to 3.5 ppm of copper into the water, which is stored in 300,000 gal. tank. By the time the water reaches the plant it's at about 2 ppm. The benefits? Less algae (important with booms putting out so much mist on rooting plants); less downy mildew, especially on roses (they put out NO fungicide on roses now, he says); and little to no bacterial leaf spot. The system is easy to run and maintain, too. And according to the Aqua-Hort website, they make systems suited for small growers as well.



3. Steam sterilization

Talk about old technologies! Steam sterilization of in-ground planting beds is one of the first things written about in *GrowerTalks* and the Ball RedBook, for all the cut flower growers of the day. Then chemicals like methyl bromide overtook steam, until even the knowledge of how to do steam sterilization was almost lost.

Bailey grows most of their 22 acres of woody liners in sand beds, which means they need to sterilize them every season. With chemical options more and more scarce, they tested out solarization—using plastic sheeting and the heat of the sun to warm the soil. But there's just not enough dependable sunlight in Minnesota for that to work. So they decided to make a return to tried-and-true steam—which meant building their own system from scratch, using a big Sioux boiler on a trailer, with another trailer hauling a massive hose. It works, of course, and they can do a 250-ft. bay in a day.



Sometimes the old way is the best way.



4. Remote-control trimming

Then again, sometimes the old way is dangerous.

Such as the gas mowers that workers haul over the tops of liners to trim them. There is a pair of them on a wheeled frame, pulled by ropes. One slip and ...

Which is why R&D Fabrication Foreman Ken Holz is building a remote-controlled version of the trimmer. Workers will be able to stand at the end of the bay with the remote control pack hung around their neck. With that, they can start, drive and reverse the unit to trim everything in the bay without having to be in the machine's path.

It was still in the fab shop when I saw it; Ken was just putting the finishing touches on it before putting it to the test in the greenhouse. In the picture below, the wheels are in tow mode; they'll swivel 90 degrees then lock, to drive up and down the bay.





5. Air hose door-opener

Possibly the simplest idea I spotted at Bailey is for opening greenhouse doors: a gas station-style hose (remember the ones that made a bell ding when you jumped up and down on them as kids?) across the path that opens the door when a vehicle crosses it. Not that pulling a cord is hard, but this is even easier.



Of course, when I mentioned what happens when the switch fails, my guide cringed—apparently, a few doors have been, er, dinged.



One last thing I noticed at Bailey, but noticed wrong: Two of their container nursery locations are named for their location: For instance, Lot 3 is also known as Container West, Lot 4 is Container East. So when we drove to the propagation location, Lot 6, and I noted they called it “Nord Farm,” I assumed “Nord” was the Scandinavian version of north, and they used it in honor of the area’s settlers.

Nope. “Nord Farm” was the name of the farm when they bought it. Not only that, but it’s also south of the other farms.

Good thing I asked!

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Customer Day at Ball

I got back to Chicagoland just in time to attend my own company’s annual open house, the big Ball Seed Field Day and Customer Day, always held the last Friday in July. (Based on that, next year it will be July 31.)

The weather was flawless, and the crowd was huge—at least 1,200, I’m told, the biggest crowd since 2005, Ball’s centennial year.



As usual, videographer extraordinaire Jen Zurko and I captured the highlights, which you can watch [HERE](#). They include a beautiful shady garden filled with Beacon Impatiens (the IDM-resistant one), new vegetative annuals from Ball FloraPlant and Selecta, a pretty orange dipladenia from Ball Ingenuity, and news on graphical tracking help for your fall mums.



Finally ...

Where am I off to this time? Alaska. For dinner. At a peony farm.

It's okay to hate me.

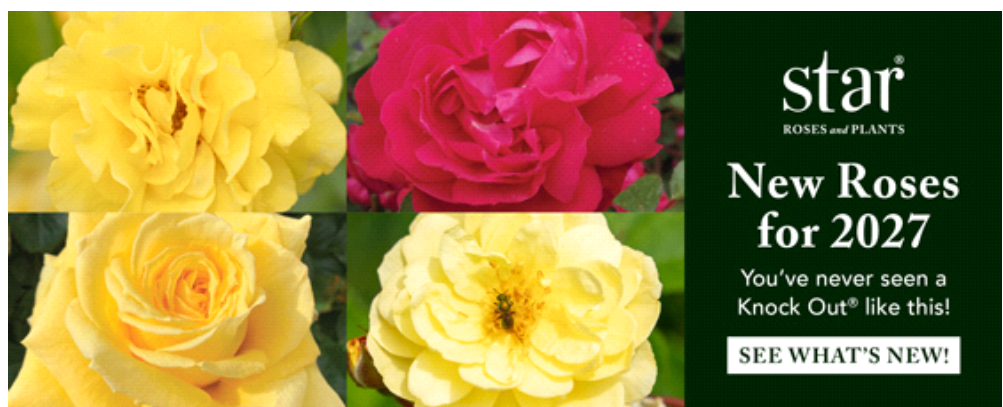
I'll be at the [Field to Vase Dinner](#) organized by Certified American Grown. Laurie and I attended one in Wisconsin last fall and had such a good time we commented to administrator Kasey Cronquist (also the head of the California Cut Flower Commission) that it'd be cool to do the Alaska event. The next day a pair of press passes were in my inbox for dinner at [Joslyn Peonies](#) in Homer.

Well, how does one turn that down?



Of course, I'll be learning all about the burgeoning Alaska peony business. And we'll hit some garden centers in the Anchorage area. And since I'm not rich enough to fly to Alaska just for dinner, we'll be hopping onto a cruise ship for the ride down to Vancouver. Which will be a challenge for us, because while there may be glaciers and bears and whales along the Inland Passage, there are no nurseries that I'm aware of.

But if there are, we'll find them!



See you next time,



Chris Beytes

Editor

GrowerTalks and Green Profit

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