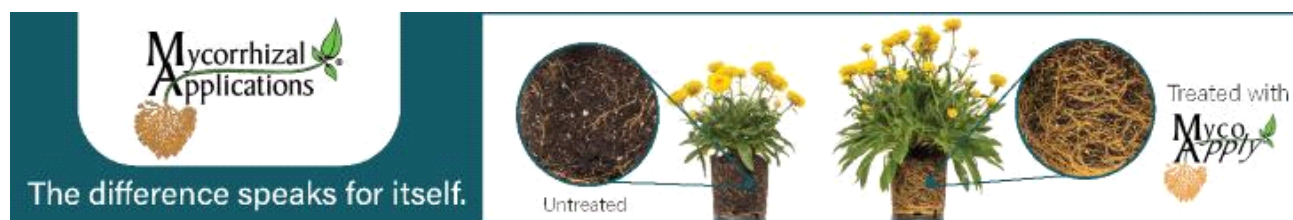
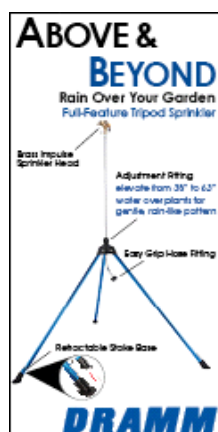


Chris went to England, plus what Walmart's doing, NIPW and bag swag



THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2019

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Green Profit's
buzz!
Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

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Finally ...

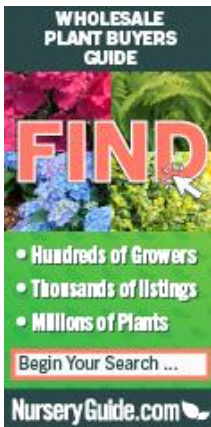


Chris Toured England

Bossman Chris Beytes puts his annual trip on the International Garden Center Association tour in the category of "vacation," he and his wife love going so much. I put it in the category of vacation for myself, too, because Chris ends up writing a bunch of stuff for Buzz and I can take a few hours off from writing myself! Here is what he's gathered for us from Jolly Ol' England (now excuse me while I go snooze under a tree):



Most trips I'm happy to share with my fellow editors. The International Garden Center Association annual tour is not one of them. It's just too much fun ... er, I mean hard work, and it wouldn't be fair of me to inflict that upon them. No, as their fearless leader, it was up to me to spend five days in England visiting garden centers with 234 of the best garden center owners and managers from 19 countries. If the organizers happen to toss in Kew Gardens, Wisley Gardens, a Thames River cruise and a tour of the Bombay Sapphire distillery, well, I can't exactly jump off the bus, can I?



But work we did, and here's proof:

Houseplants—big!

Same as here, houseplants and foliage are hot with consumers, especially younger ones. English garden centers have the advantage of being close to awesome European producers, so the selection and quality we spotted was excellent. Foliage expert Laurie (aka "the wife") spotted a hairy-stemmed philodendron.



Plant of the week

You can never go wrong with a picture frame to highlight something. Stewart's Garden Centre used it for their Plant of the Week.





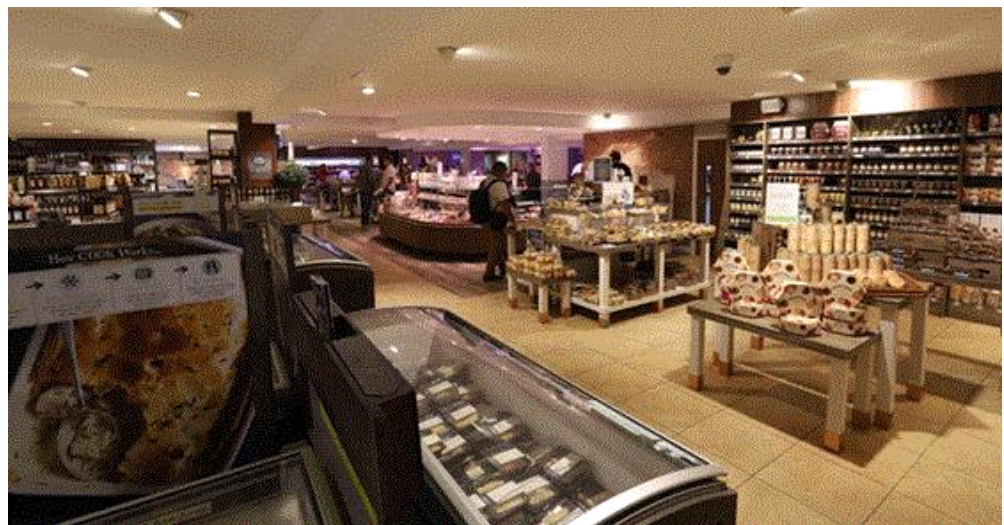
Abundant, informative signage

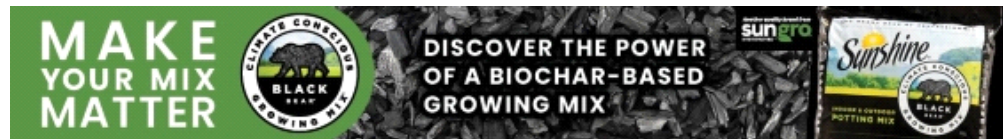
The Brits have us beat when it comes to signage. Thanks to excellent, abundant signage, within 15 minutes of browsing any center I knew their history, their plant guarantee (which they all seem to offer, from 2 to 5 years) and any services they offer.



Food is half the business

If you've visited UK garden centers, you know that food halls (think small grocery stores) and restaurants are a big part of the business—in many cases, 50% or more of revenues. That hasn't changed; if anything, food is more important—locally grown, locally sourced, butcher shops, fresh produce and mouth-watering display cases of baked goods. Who needs McDonald's?





Three Unexpected Hot Sellers

- They might not be your cup of tea, but we were told these resin animal figures, including 850-pound gorillas (that's pounds sterling—about \$1,050 U.S.), are big sellers.



- Artificial buxus aren't quite so crazy once you learn that the box moth and their caterpillars are wiping out boxwood. Traps help, but some homeowners are switching to convincing-looking fakes, said Andy Bunker of Alton Garden Centre.



- Solar garden lights are obviously one of the hot new categories; every center we visited had a massive display.



Looks can be deceiving

I love the history and patina of England. Like this giant lead planter in front of Hatfield House, the 400-year-old ancestral home of Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, the 7th Marquess of Salisbury, a one-time leader of the House of Lords. I contemplated how old it was and how much it weighed.

Then I rapped on it with my knuckles and discovered that it wasn't lead, it was fiberglass. I was so disillusioned.



Meet your new IGCA board member

Michael Bracken, co-owner of Nicholson-Hardie Nursery & Garden Center was elected to the Board of the IGCA at their annual general meeting. It's been quite a while since the U.S. has had representation on the organization's board. Congrats, Michael!



I'll be covering more in *Acres Online* and *Green Profit*, including the features and elements that all the best garden centers have in common.



I Jinxed Myself

When I say, “the last three!” or something similar, that guarantees there’s at least one more something to mention. That’s what happened last week when I mentioned the last three Retailers’ Choice Award winners—I missed one! The good folks at Van Belle Nursery, who won the award, wrote in to say, “Um, what about us?” My apologies!

Van Belle's Weigela x Strobe is certainly not worthy to be dropped from any list. The reason it won an award was because it was just so darn colorful—the bright pink flowers against a foliage backdrop that changes from green-bronze to orange and then red. A tidy shrub at 3 ft. x 3 ft. Full sun to part shade and hardy to Zone 4.



While I'm on the topic of Farwest, I may as well mention two other items that I seemed to foul up on and readers pointed out to me:

- Award winner Nepeta Blue Prelude does not have iris-like blooms. Each tiny flower looks more like a teeny orchid. You decide.



- I may have mentioned that *Pilea microphylla* Variegata was “another fern!” It most definitely is not! I may have been thinking “another houseplant.”

I’m not going to say “and that’s it from Farwest!”



Speaking of Houseplants

So let me give you a gentle reminder that the National Indoor Plant Week starts this coming Sunday, September 15!

“Houseplants sell themselves now, all I have to do is collect the money!” is what you are saying to me, am I right? Even if that’s true, with a little urging from you, you could move those sales up a tick or two.

Over in my *Tropical Topics* e-newsletter, I’ve been encouraging suppliers to team up with a social media-savvy houseplant expert to engage younger audiences and get new varieties either in the hands or in the social feeds of consumers. Here’s an example of what that might look like from author and expert Leslie Halleck:



Click on the photo to see the video.

The folks at [GrowIt!](#) are also conducting a consumer engagement effort. They'll be giving away houseplants every day all next week. They'll also gather some important consumer information as they do so by asking their GrowIt! plant community members questions like what houseplants are on their wishlists that they can't find. Hopefully they'll be sharing that information with their friends at *Buzz* (right, Mason and Seth?)

What does a giveaway or houseplant promotion of some sort look like at a local retail level? Is it an e-blast? In-store event? School/senior center visit? Tell me what you're doing so I can feature it in *Buzz* next week! Drop me a note about it [HERE](#).



What's Walmart Doing?

It's always a good idea to keep an eye on your competition, right? From local retail to mega-retail, I came across two items this week about retail giant Walmart that I thought might interest you.

First, [Walmart is excited about their grocery pickup program](#). Why? Turns out that the average basket size for grocery pickups is twice that of an in-store grocery customer. I have not tried Walmart's online ordering, but I imagine it has Amazon-like prompts such as "If you like that, then

why not try this?" For those of you exploring online ordering for your stores, how might you consider ways to increase your own cart size?

Second, **Walmart is piloting in-store pollinator gardens**. Whoa! That's hitting close to home. They are testing this out in Oregon, Washington and North Carolina, setting up a total of 21 gardens. These gardens are meant to "beautify the stores' outdoor grounds" while increasing local pollinator populations. A company spokesperson said they hope the gardens will "spur shoppers, employees and local community members to plant their own." Also mentioned in the article about this was Walmart's "commitment to leverage its size and scale for good." Customers are indeed watching and listening. What are they seeing and hearing from you?



Connect Plus

Here's something that Walmart—or any of the big boxes—aren't doing. They aren't participating in Proven Winners' IGC-only program called Connect Plus. It's a marketing initiative that is available to all IGCs regardless of size, volume or previous purchases, and is a simplification of Proven Winners' existing à la carte marketing offerings like Gardener's Idea Books, access to a custom POP design team, ready-made social graphics, Pandora and/or Facebook ad campaigns—even custom videos with Laura of Garden Answer!

Connect Plus offers those same offerings, but in a bundle, with three different bundles or tiers currently available. Take a look at the three paid tiers and what's offered in each [HERE](#). An entry-level "Getting Started" package is still available and still free. The paid tiers go above and beyond that starter package.

Proven Winners created Connect Plus to help alleviate the marketing work for the independent. And if you look at the pricing, you couldn't find marketing and design work on your own for less than what PW is charging. So in that case, it's a no-brainer. It's also a way for retailers to check multiple marketing to-do items off the list at once by giving those tasks to someone else. Whew, right? And one last benefit of going with any one of these tiers: If the package you choose is kinda sorta good for you but not perfect, like if you could use an extra 2 weeks of ad campaigns, you can simply add that on (for a fee) so you end up getting what you really need. I'd include a screenshot of the tiers and offerings but honestly, it's so big with so much included it would end up being hard for you to read.

Oh, and the other great thing about it is if you register prior to January 1, you'll save some money on that package. You're planning on getting all of your marketing planned as early as you can anyway, right?



Bags with Plant Swagger

Colleague Kim Brown sent me a link to an Eventbrite blog post. The event promoting/ticketing site had written about how to make those ever-present "swag bags" a little less trash-worthy; i.e. including stuff receivers would really want to hold on to.

One of the ideas is right up your alley, garden retailers! Here it is: Adding a little potted plant to the bag that will end up on the receiver's desk. "Plants don't just brighten up the office," the article says. "They also lift your attendees' spirits throughout the workday. And, long after your event has ended, a variety of fun little desk succulents will ensure your event is top of mind throughout the year. Just be sure to offer plants that come in small boxes so that they can travel easily."

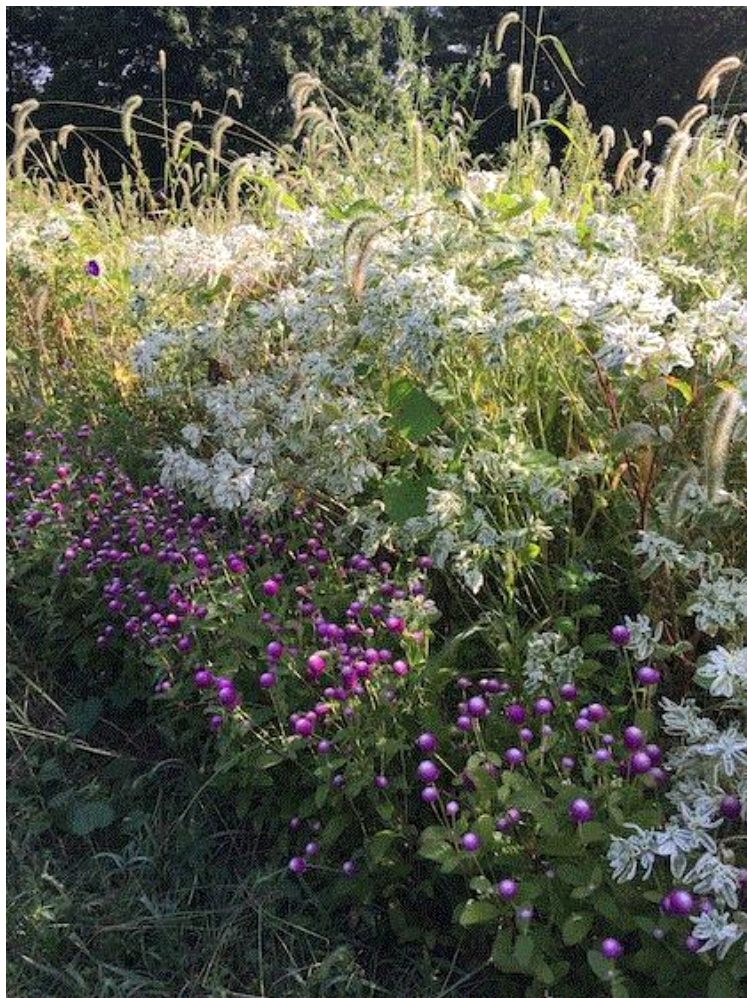
That's where you come in. Have you considered offering the service of packing up a plant-containing swag bag for area businesses? And if the plant were in a store-branded pot, they could become customers. Feasible? Not gonna try it? Drop me a line about it [HERE](#).

Rudbeckia 'Treasure Trove'
New to Proven Winners
Perennials for 2025-2026!



Finally ...

It took me all summer, but I found my favorite plant and color combination. A swath of frothy Snow in Summer (*Euphorbia marginata*) sitting perfectly atop gomphrena. Okay, I admit, there may be some weeds in there, too.



Why am I including this? Well, it reminds me of vanilla ice cream with a berry sauce. Which is to say, seeing this planting makes me happy. And it's nice to include something in *Buzz* now and then that just brings me joy. (Now, none of you write in to tell me this is invasive or something

similarly horrible.)

Comments, questions, suggestions? Send them to ewells@ballpublishing.com.



Ellen Wells
Editor-at-Large
Green Profit

This week's BuZZ! was sent to 21,972 loyal readers!

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