

At the Michigan Garden Plant Tour



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FRIDAY, JULY 30, 2021

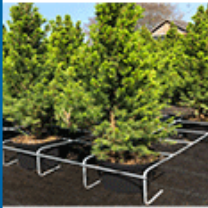
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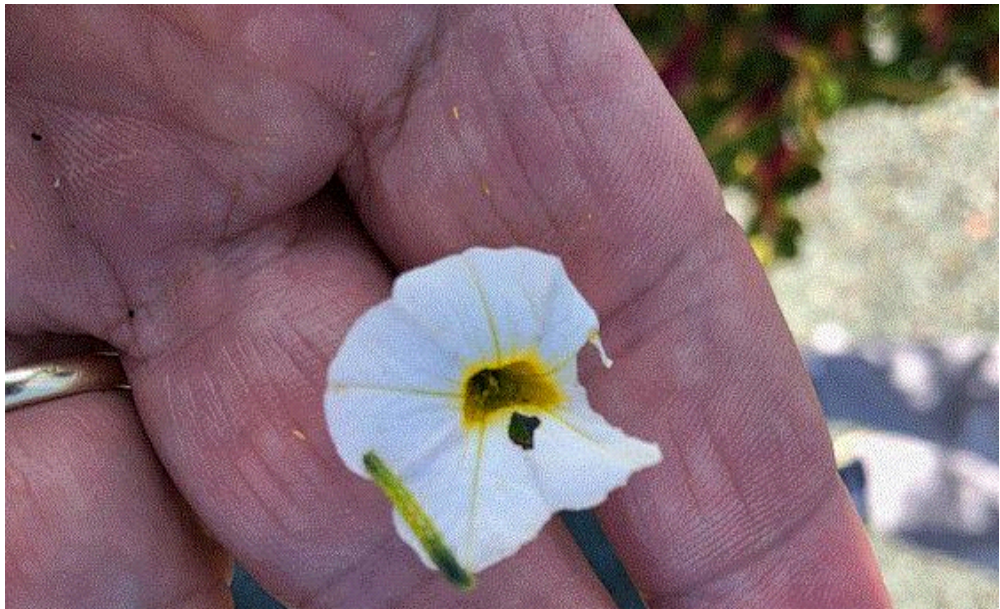
COMING UP THIS WEEK:

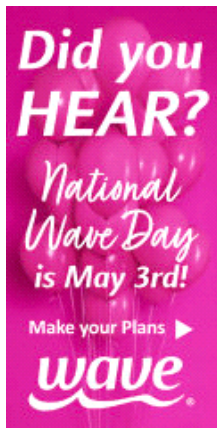
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Got budworms?

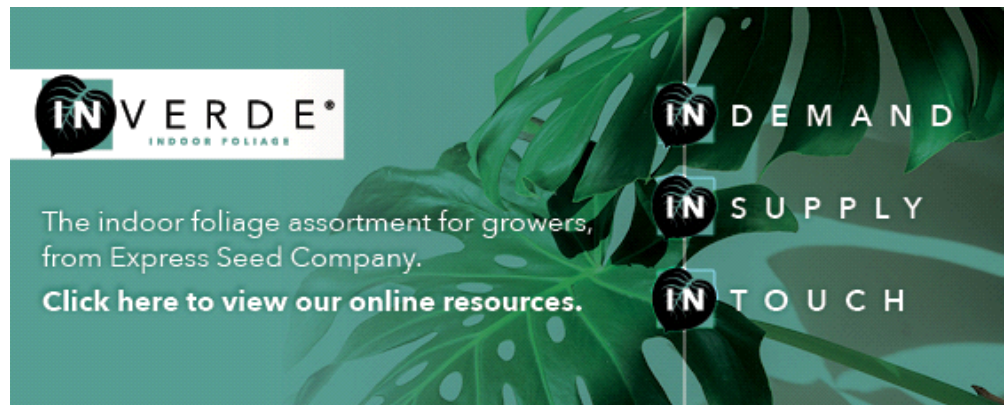
Before we head to Michigan, a quick question: Have any of you been having problems with budworm in your greenhouse, gardens or landscape plantings?





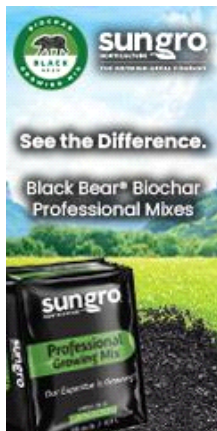
I lunched next to Ball's Dr. Mike Klopmeier yesterday and he mentioned that budworm has shown up for the second year running in the Ball gardens. Budworm has never been a problem in the long history of the gardens, but they showed up in 2020, when by mid-August they'd chewed most of the flowers off the petunias and calibrachos. They're back again this year and Mike is curious if others (whether in the Midwest or anywhere else) are seeing the same thing.

Email me at beytes@growertalks.com if you've got insights into budworms.



In Michigan

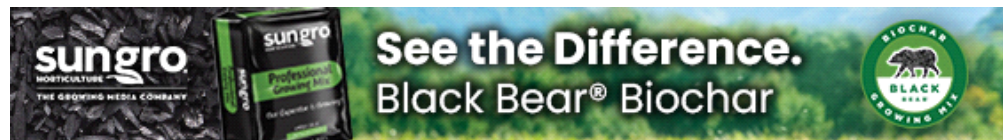
This week, Jen Zurko, Bill Calkins and I were in Michigan for the 18th annual Michigan Garden Plant Tour, two-week, four-greenhouse, one-university, self-guided tour of outdoor container, and bed annual and perennial trials.



We started Monday at Walters Gardens in Zeeland, went northwest to Pell Greenhouses in Hudsonville, then drove straight north into the woods and farm country of Conklin to stop in at Mike Fernandez’s house, where the Danziger Market Manager for North America runs a tidy little trial on his 40-acre farm (it’s not part of the official tour).

Day two, Tuesday, started at Mast Young Plants in nearby Grand Rapids and then the hour-long drive to Michigan State University, another hour south to Raker-Roberta’s in Litchfield, then 90 minutes east to our lodging in Monroe, below Detroit. Day three, Wednesday, we wrapped up with a visit to Four Star Greenhouse to check out the new Proven Winners stuff and to see their latest construction projects before making the five-hour drive back home to Chicagoland.

The three-day trip covered about 800 miles and 13 hours of driving (plus at least 200 songs from the very good “The Guess Who” Pandora station)—a lot for seven visits, but well worth it, especially since it had been a dozen years since I’d made the trip before and it was time to catch up. Here’s a quick recap of what you missed ... or what you can still see if you go next week:



Walters Gardens

Marketing Manager Andrew Jager, and VP of Marketing and Industry Relations Christa (Walters) Steenwyk took us around **Walters Gardens’** “living catalog” of about 1,100 perennial varieties, which includes the Dennis and Harriet Walters Hosta Walk (with more than 150 varieties), hibiscus, daylilies, mangave (that unusual manfreda/agave cross that looks like it should grow on Mars) and more. If you’re into perennials, professionally or personally, Walters is a great place to learn more about them.



We were there to see the new varieties for Proven Winners perennials, which included:

- Rock ‘N Grow Sedum Back in Black, which is guaranteed to have the darkest foliage you’ve seen on a sedum. It’s got garnet red flowers, but isn’t selected for them—it’s selected for the almost black foliage. (Personally, I preferred Sedum Rock ‘n Round, which, when grown in a clump and covered with flower buds, almost looks like a garden boulder in the landscape bed). Zones 3 to 9.

- The Kniphofia Pyromania collection was in full bloom and striking. They'll bloom from the Fourth of July onward. The collection has six colors; Orange Blaze was "soft-launched" last year and is now fully available, we were told. Zones 5b to 9.

- Agastache Meant to Bee is a new collection of taller, more robust bee balm. It's an interspecific type, which gives it its strength and size. Two colors are Queen Nectarine and Royal Raspberry. Zones 6 to 9.



Walters varieties (continued)

- Pennisetum Lemon Squeeze is part of Proven Winners' Prairie Winds collection. This fountain grass has striking gold foliage (which doesn't burn in the sun, they say!) topped with copper panicles starting in mid-summer.



- We got a sneak peek at Astilbe Darkside of the Moon (not to be confused with the album of the similar name by Pink Floyd). Like Back in Black, it's got dark, dark foliage. Blooms are purply-pink.

- Mangave Praying Hands is not a PW variety, but it could be, it's so unusual. Think artichoke, only bigger and cooler. It won a Retailers' Choice Award at Cultivate'21 in July. Alas, these manfreda/agave crosses are only hardy to Zone 7, but you can overwinter them indoors as Walters does, then plant them back out into beds or pots.



In hosta, look for Silly String, Dancing with Dragons, Voices in the Wind and the very tall Miss America (the latter two are in the Proven Winners Shadowlands collection). Miss America (pictured with Andrew) has nice variegation and is said to have the vigor of a fully green hosta. And it was selected for those amazing lavender scapes.





Pell Greenhouses

Darin DeCator, the new (as of 2020) co-owner (along with second-generation owner Michael Pell) of Pell Greenhouses, was our guide for a quick look around their display. Pell specializes in young plants from Dümme Orange, Westhoff, Danziger, Green Fuse and a few others; and also does contract growing for several of the local Michigan mass market growers.

The trial was the smallest of all of that we visited; their primary goal is to plant one plant per pot to see how they perform and to answer the question, "If the consumer buys one plant and puts it in the ground, what will it look like?" Pell had dropped out of the Michigan Garden Plant Tour for several years, but decided to rejoin this year.



While the trial is modest, it does have this striking centerpiece of calibrachoa. That's Darin showing it off.



Danziger

We got a special invite to **Danziger's** Market Manager Mike Fernandez's private trials at his 40-acre farm outside of Grand Rapids, where he has a donkey named Jack (who was suspicious of us), a goat named Peachy (who was hiding from us) and a dog named Lovey (who was VERY excited to see us).



I try to convince Jack I'm harmless.



On a hidden parcel behind his house, Mike has a large plot of outdoor trials (along with two greenhouses) where we saw about 400 pots and baskets of Danziger's very latest varieties. This is not a catalog; it's a proving ground for new-variety candidates and their comparisons in pots and baskets. Many brokers and buyers crash Mike's place over a three-week span to see his trials.



More Danziger

- Colibri is Danziger's "controlled growth" compact calibrachoa. Colibri Pink Bling, Purple Bling and Exotic Red are now allowed in North America, as Danziger has gotten permission to use this star pattern, which is protected by utility patent. The same goes for Colibri Abstract, which has a painted-flower look (that's Abstract Pink, below). And in the multi-colored Ombre calibrachoa, the yet-to-be-named 20-9610 (bottom) will probably join Pink, Yellow, Blush and Blue, all introduced last year for '21.



And two more ...

- Mike had a large display of Danziger's Durabella combinations. These are designed for low input costs—three liners will fill out a 12-in. basket or tub in 12 weeks or less. I happened to like Durabella Ombre Sundown, featuring three of the Colibri Ombre colors.

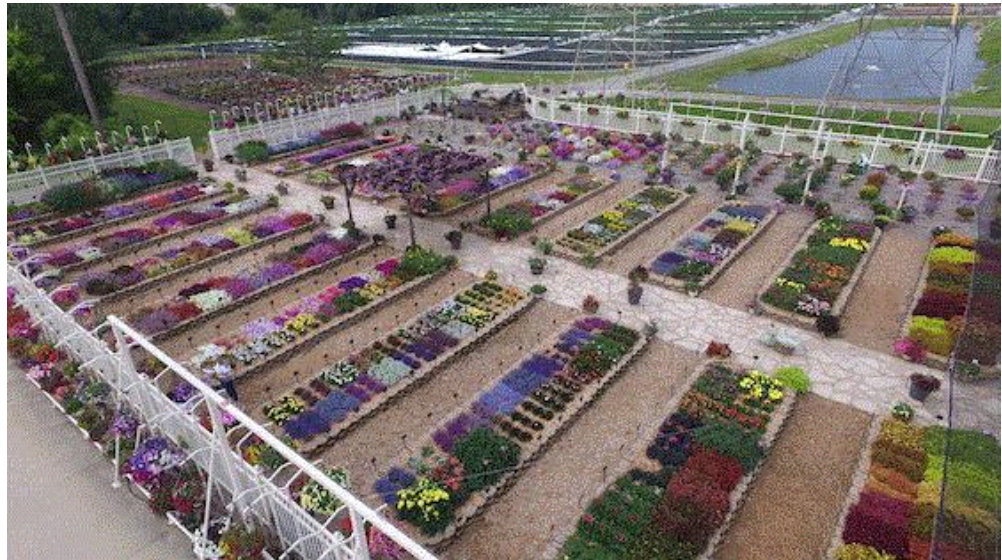


- One of the future varieties that caught our eye was a heat-tolerant sutera (bacopa) that looked pretty good considering how hot it was. It had some flowers while all the others were just green. We might see this introduced in 2023 for '24.



Mast Young Plants

Mast Young Plants (formerly Glass Corner Greenhouses) is another “living catalog” trial, said General Manager Brian Weesies, featuring both well-seasoned and brand new varieties from their young plant catalog, in ground beds, pots and baskets, depending upon how the plant most likely will be used.



In the original and main trial garden (foreground), they arrange plants alphabetically, A to Z, in 20 beds, 22 varieties to a bed. When that filled up, they expanded down the hill in hundreds of pots, adding an All-America Selections trial; big comparisons of angelonia, lantana and celosia; a Proven Winners comparison trial ... all told, more than 1,800 varieties! The trial grounds are a permanent part of their "Innovating Department," used to evaluate new varieties, and are open to visitors from early July into October.

A few favorites

A few of Brian's favorites (as noted by Jen Zurko, who was taking copious notes while I snapped photos) include: Artemisia SunFern (Darwin Perennials), Calibrachoa Calitastic Bordeaux Star (Westhoff), Calibrachoa Colibri Purple Bling and Pink Bling (Danziger), Petunia Blanket Silver Surprise (Green Fuse), Mimulus Mai Tai Red (Danziger), and Petunia Crazytunia Mayan Sunset (Westhoff).



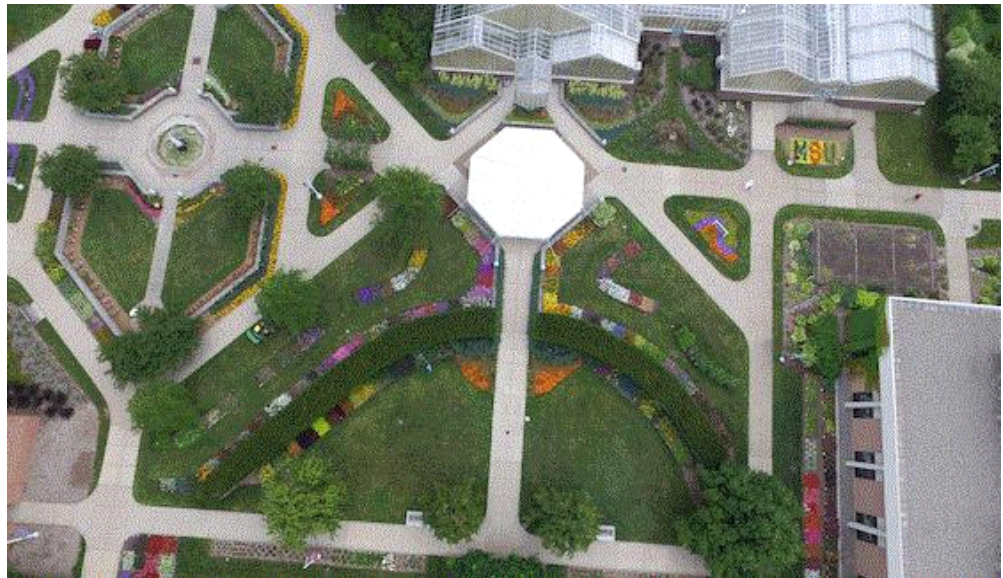
Artemisia SunFern.

Grower Michael DeBerti created most of the scores of combination pots and baskets in the trial. They're not randomly put together—Brian made sure to tell us that Michael puts a lot of design into each combo. They also may include plants from different breeders in one pot, but all of the plants are available from Mast. I especially liked this one (Deco-Pot #119), which includes *Carex* Red Rooster, *Coleus* Main Street Wall Street, *Salvia splendens* Saucy Coral and *Calibrachoa* Mini Famous Neo Orange + Eye.



Michigan State University

The MSU trial beds have a 35-year history of decorating the campus as it's grown up around them, creating an oasis of color. The current 2-acre (or so) garden winds around the grounds of the horticulture, plant science and biology departments. There's also a large 4-H Children's Garden, if you want to bring the crumb-crunchers along on your trial visit.



Between the display trials and the decorative flower beds, trial garden manager Daedre McGrath said there are 300 to 400 “sponsored” varieties—those supplied by breeders who pay for the privilege of being on display. There are also plenty of perennials, herbs, veggies, landscape succulents, woodyies and more; all told, the gardens contain some 30,000 plants, so it's a pretty display! It's maintained by a summer crew of about 15 paid students who are learning first-hand what it's like to plant and maintain a big garden. Here's Daedre (right) with a pair of them, Cole Spence and Rylee Hrnyak.



Finally ...

Next time, we'll return to Michigan for highlights from Raker-Roberta's and Four Star Greenhouses (including their latest greenhouse projects). And I'll recap the highlights from Ball Seed Customer Day (actually "days," as it took place Wednesday through Friday of this week).

See you next time!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Chi'.

Chris Beytes
Editor
GrowerTalks and Green Profit

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