

Some Costa Foliage, TOD Foliage Tutorials and “Benefishals”



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# TROPICAL TOPICS

## COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- Bonkers with Benefishals
- Foliage First-looks
- White Knights to Cat-Proof
- Alocasias
- Grow Like a Pro

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## Bonkers with "Benefishals"

In the last *Tropical Topics*, I mentioned the Utopia Festival of horticultural and epicurean delights held in Boston a few weeks ago. I had one last item about that show that I wanted to mention. It's that I ran into Joe Blanchard of Fish Head Farms out of Seekonk, Massachusetts. I had met Joe previously at the Tropical Plant International Expo back in January where Fish Head Farms was drumming up business for their product called Fish Sh!t, an organic soil conditioner.





As their [WEBSITE](#) says, this is not an NPK fertilizer. It's a solution filled with beneficial bacteria—they claim over 4,000 different kinds—that drastically improves the soil's microbiome. This improved microbiome aids with nutrient and mineral uptake, and acts as a biocontrol agent to help fight off pests, parasites and root diseases. They also claim it promotes leaf variegation and increases overall growth. Use it with any line of nutrients and in any medium. Joe tells me that cannabis growers rave about the stuff, and now foliage growers and interiorscapers are getting into it, too.

Yes, Fish Sh!t is what the name implies. Actually, it's composted fish manure, not actual fish poop. And it's OMRI-listed for organic use. Fish Sh!t is available in a range of sizes, from 120-ml bottles to 20-L containers. Sell it or use it! Find out more about the details of the product and how to order [HERE](#).



## Foliage First-looks

*Jen Zurko did most of the heavy lifting for this edition of Tropical Topics with the following report from Costa Farms' Season Premiere event held in Homestead, Florida, in early March. Here's what she had to say:*

While I was at Costa Farms to attend their Season Premiere event a couple of weeks ago, I asked Justin Hancock, Costa's Senior Brand Marketing Manager, for a peek at some of their new foliage introductions. Since I knew Ellen and Chris had already stopped by Costa's booth and talked to Justin at TPIE back in January, I specifically asked him if he could show me the ones they *didn't* see.

Before we talked new cultivars, I asked Justin how things have changed with regard to tropicals and houseplants. Two words: tissue culture.

"TC is totally changing the game," he said. "You may be working with one lab, but it won't be at one lab for long."

This is why the varieties in Costa's Trending Tropicals program are constantly being changed out—once something goes mainstream or starts saturating the market, they take it out. Justin said the goal is to supply the most unique varieties possible.

Speaking of varieties, here are some of the ones Justin showed me at Costa Farms:



**Philodendron Ring of Fire.** Ring of Fire has a similar habit and leaf shape as Golden Crocodile that Costa had in their booth at TPIE, but it's variegated. The variegation starts out in a copper color that turns into a creamy white. Justin said philodendrons are hot plants right now.



## From White Knights to Cat-Proof Alocasias

*Jen continues ...*

**Philodendron White Knight.** Another philodendron, but a climbing type that Justin said a lot of consumers put on moss poles. Every leaf has a different splash or smattering of white, which he said works well with any home décor.



**Alocasia Jacklyn.** I'm a touchy-feely person (with people AND plants), so the first thing I did when I saw Jacklyn was reach out and touch her leaves. She's got a really cool texture and Justin said it gives you another connection with the plant. The foliage is multi-colored with veining and the petioles are mottled, making it look—but thankfully not feel—like a lizard's skin.



**Pothos Lemon Meringue.** I never thought I would get excited about a pothos, but here we are. Lemon Meringue is a sport that Costa found in their breeding greenhouses with gold and yellow variegation instead of white like we've seen on other cultivars. The variegation does fade as it matures, but the higher the light, the brighter the variegation.



**Alocasia azlanii.** If you have a cat that's a houseplant assassin like I do, then you'll appreciate this one. I like it because it stays short and compact, so it's good for when you have to keep your plants out of reach on a shelf, counter or table. The foliage is also really interesting—it has purple leaves with lavender veining and a slight metallic sheen.



*Thank you, Jen Z! I have a cat assassin, too, and I feel your pain.*



## Grow Like a Pro

If you're new to tropical and foliage plant growing—or you're experienced, but are always open to learning new stuff—I'll share some videos that colleague Bill Calkins made with Andrew Britten, the technical manager for tropicals and foliage at Ball.



In the videos, Bill and Andrew cover the most common genera from A to Z, as well as do some deep diving into the forms of young plants used in North America. And among the good bits of

technical info, Andrew shares his tips and tricks for avoiding and managing pests and diseases. As a life-long vegetable gardener I know there's a big difference between growing a crop and growing a crop with the pressures of all creatures great and small. It's most of the battle!

For the A to Z tropical and foliage list, Andrew and Bill broke it down into three videos:

- [PART 1: A-C](#)
- [PART 2: D-L](#)
- [PART 3: M-Z](#)

This **STARTER MATERIAL VIDEO** includes information on the different forms it can take, which includes Unrooted Cuttings (URC), Tissue Culture (TC), Calloused Cuttings (CC), Rooted Cuttings (RC), Air Layer (A/L), Canes and Stumps.

As for the pest and disease management aspects of growing foliage and tropicals, the pair have divided the information into two videos to make it all more digestible and easier to turn to when problems arise. Find what you need to corral the creatures (i.e. pests and diseases) in these two videos:

- [CONTROLLING INSECT PESTS ON TROPICAL PLANTS](#)
- [PREVENTING & MANAGING DISEASES ON TROPICAL PLANTS](#)

Comments, questions, suggestions? Email me about them at [ewells@ballpublishing.com](mailto:ewells@ballpublishing.com).



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