

Camp Monrovia, bird food recall, YRA finalists and 15 and counting!



FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 2023

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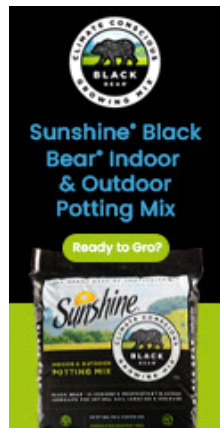
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Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Camp Monrovia
It's Not About You
Webinar Alert!
Is It Spring Elsewhere?
A Place to Relax
What About Mother's Day?
And the Finalists Are ...
Bird Food Recall
Acres of buZZ! from CAST

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Camp Monrovia

Spring is coming, but not fast enough for this New Englander. Needing to catch a sneak peek of warmth and some leafy green trees, I eagerly accepted an invitation to attend a media and influencer event at Monrovia's Cairo ("Kay-ro"), Georgia, nursery.





This week's Camp Monrovia event was an opportunity to get a group of southern gardeners and small garden-related business owners having a sophisticated social media presence into the nursery to see what it is that Monrovia is doing in Georgia. Mind you, most gardeners never see how their plants are grown en masse, like some kids have no idea how potatoes grow. This window into the production process was truly eye-opening for them.



We toured the 200-300 acres of production at the 800-acre facility, a former White's Nursery property. It's one of the oldest nursery properties in the U.S., in fact, having been a nursery since the late 1800s. Monrovia has been here since 2000.

Here are a few other numbers I collected from the tour:



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MAGAZINE &
THE GARDEN CENTER
GROUP ARE HAPPY TO
PRESENT:



- Roughly 273 employees, or “craftsmen” work here, with about 75 of those coming on during the peak season.
- The property includes two constructed wetlands to remediate greenhouse runoff.
- About 44 new hoop houses are going up with plans for more.
- 55,000 camellias—all pruned by hand!
- 6 acres of *Hydrangea macrophylla*—all reblooming varieties.
- 10,000 hours of weeding by hand logged last year.
- Nearly two dozen trucks a day leave the loading docks ramping up toward the Mother’s Day weekend rush.
- 1,478 varieties are grown on the property. Include all the sizes available for each and that number explodes upward.
- 1 million-plus plants go through the potting line each year.
- 33 months is the average time a plant is grown here.
- 1 resident alligator, known as the “security craftsman,” patrols one of the property’s ponds.



It’s Not About You

If you have a big nursery or greenhouse operation, some of those numbers above might seem like no big deal to you. But these Atlanta-based social media gardeners, landscapers and container designers were *impressed*. This event isn’t about you, after all—it’s about these attendees who will spread the news about the industry in general (“Wow, look at all the work that goes into growing these topiaries!”) and about Monrovia’s catalog of plants specifically. And that helps everybody in the industry.



Who were my fellow “campers”? Click on the links to be taken to their relevant social media or content links. You’ll want to get to know these folks, especially you Southern retailers, so you can see what they are sharing with their customers and followers.

- Container designer Ashley Skandalakis of [Atlanta Planters](#).
- Container designer Jennifer Rust of [Jennifer Rust Botanicals](#).
- Claudia Weekes, who is behind [The Organized Homemaker](#) account on Instagram (35,000

followers and likely on other social platforms, too), an account that journals her homesteading and gardening journey on a 3-acre orchard and garden in Georgia.

- Michelle of the [GardensAndChickens](#) Instagram account with 30,000 followers.
- Writers and visual designers Mark and Debbie Wolfe, both of whom are on staff at BobVila.com, freelance for various consumer magazines and write the blog [theprudentgarden.com](#).
- Atlanta-based Writer Lynn Coulter, a freelancer focusing on travel and gardens with publications such as HGTV, Southern Living and many others. Read a sample of her work [HERE](#).
- Jason Burnett, Digital Manager for [Flower Magazine](#). He's also a foodie and was editorial director for Allrecipes.
- Doug Scott is the owner and lead designer at [Redeem Your Ground](#), an exterior design firm, based in Atlanta.
- Brooke Garcia, Garden Director for a little place in Waco you may have heard of, Magnolia Home. A proud Kansas State grad, Brooke has her hands in all gardening aspects of The Silos and the Gaines' home. Follow her on [INSTAGRAM](#).

Thank you, Monrovia, for a memorable visit “behind the curtain” and for the chance to meet some incredible people.



Webinar Alert!

Remember that “Do or Dianthus Part 1” webinar you attended back in early February? Part 2 of the webinar series is coming up next week! It’s called “Do or Dianthus Part 2: Being Successful from Rooting to Finishing” and will cover all of the production details to produce a top-notch crop. Gary Vollmer will guide you through the growing, along with James Doukas and Nathan Jahnke, including the topics of:

Scheduling—How to time your production across the different types of dianthus, growing region, growing structures and temperature

Propagation—Learn the full protocols from receiving the cuttings through to finishing the liners, including mist management, PGRs and more

Finishing—Pinching, nutrition, temperature, lighting, and insect and disease management across different growing systems

You’ll learn everything you need to grow some darling dianthus. Register for the April 6, 1 p.m. Eastern/Noon Central webinar [HERE](#). And thank you, Selecta One, for sponsoring it!



Is It Spring Elsewhere?

We’ve determined it is spring in Georgia, the Gulf states and Texas. Where else across this great land might spring be awakening?

Jeri Zirbel once again checked in from Caras Nursery in Montana. No longer freezing much, the weather has moderated a bit: "Close to 50 and sunny [last week] and customers were shopping. In their carts were garden art, pottery and houseplants. "We had some buying early spring blooming annuals at 25% off," Jeri added.

Last Thursday Michael Huebshman from Michael William Florist & Greenhouse in Thorofare, New Jersey, wrote in to say they aren't opening until April 4th. He mentioned a predicted dip into the 20s for the weekend (and I am pretty sure that did happen), and added, "I prefer to not have customers purchase from us and lose their plants to one night of cold. We typically wait until April to open, and perhaps that's what a lot of other folks are doing, while also dealing with the weather changes and extremes happening everywhere."

Michael went on to say it'll be an interesting spring season "between the weather, and also people's general attitudes. I find that when there are extreme circumstances happening in the political world it tends to affect sales at times. More people seem to be in-tune to 'world events' today than they were, say 10 years ago. Hopefully, people will come to our garden centers to 'download/get away/forget about' the rest of the world and purchase plants for their homes and gardens." Let's hope so, Michael!

And you? Are you open yet? Are you selling art and accessories? Or are you too busy to even reply? If any of those are your circumstance, I'll make responding easy. Just click [HERE](#). You busy folks can just write "busy" and hopefully your signature line will tell me who and where you are.



A Place to Relax

How else can you bring customers into the greenhouse when it's not quite spring? Offer yoga classes.

That's what Mill Creek Gardens in Marshfield, Wisconsin, has been doing since earlier this year. Mill Creek's Danielle Winer explained that hosting yoga classes "has been a total hit!" As of last week when we discussed the matter, Mill Creek had already hosted three sessions and they will continue to host classes every other week.

How does it work? Tickets to the yoga class are \$20, which they purchase online via Mill Creek's website. This reserves them a spot in class, which caps off at 30 attendees. Class is 45 minutes and taught by an instructor from Bluebird Yoga, a local place in Plover, Wisconsin. The fee also gets the attendee a hot or cold latte from a local coffee shop (they come on site to make the drinks! Great move!) and a \$5 coupon to Mill Creek's plant shop.



"We've sold out every time and our sales have increased dramatically on Saturdays, thanks to yoga!" Danielle said. "The \$5 coupon certainly entices folks to take home 'part of their yoga experience' with a plant!" Each time they've held yoga class, they have seen between 27-30 coupons used.

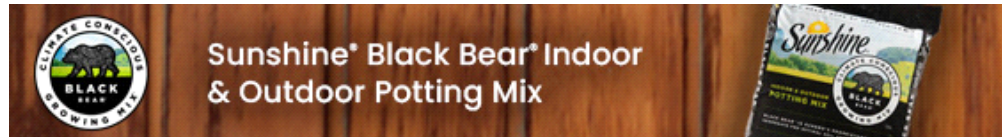


What About Mother's Day?

I asked if they might offer a mother-child yoga class on Mother's Day weekend. I know, you're laughing at me for even having that thought cross my mind. The answer is no ("It's already so, so hectic"). However, they are considering partnering with a local animal shelter to offer "puppy yoga." I think that might be more like a furry frolicking class, not a yoga class. But it would certainly draw a crowd.

Back to yoga for a minute. Danielle brings up this point: "We truly believe that plants make us healthier and happier, and that movement is important too—hence yoga! We're hoping that folks will start thinking about us as more than a greenhouse, and more as a place to connect with friends, get some vitamin D and soothe your soul!"

I agree, Danielle, puppies or not! Anyone else offering yoga classes or some other sessions that help your store become "a place to connect with friends"? Drop me a note about it [HERE](#).



And the Finalists Are ...

You might be wondering, "Hey, whatever happened to those Young Retailer and Young Grower Award nominations you encouraged us to submit?" I'm told by colleague Jen Zurko that whittling down the nominees to three finalists for each award was a very difficult task as everyone had some stellar attributes. But, choices had to be made, and they made them.

Without further ado, the Young Retailer Award finalists are:

- Samuel Di Rito—Assistant Manager/Social Media Manager for Collier's Greenhouse & Garden Center in Jackson, Georgia
- Michael Fiore—Vice President of Smith's Gardentown in Wichita Falls, Texas
- Emily Kellett—Co-owner/Founder of STUMP, Columbus, Ohio

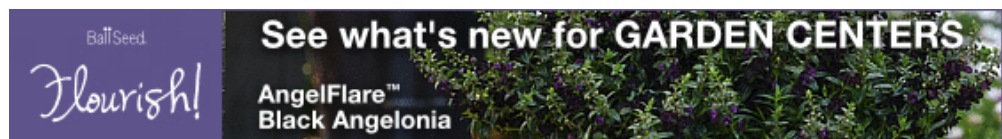
I love the variety of positions these folks hold and also the variety of businesses, too. It shows how the retail portion of the business is changing.

For the Young Grower Award, the finalists are:

- Laura Reese—Grower for Green Circle Growers in Oberlin, Ohio
- Matthew Tyson—Area Grower for Costa Farms in Miami, Florida
- Elora Wannop—Head Grower at Brookdale Treeland Nurseries, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada

Congratulations to all six finalists! If you're not familiar with how it proceeds from here, all six will write an essay on a pressing question the industry faces for the June edition of *Green Profit/GrowerTalks*, and then will be grilled by a panel of judges during the most hectic time in their growing and selling schedule. The winners will be revealed at the Unplugged Event held on the Monday of Cultivate'23 (July 17) in Columbus, Ohio.

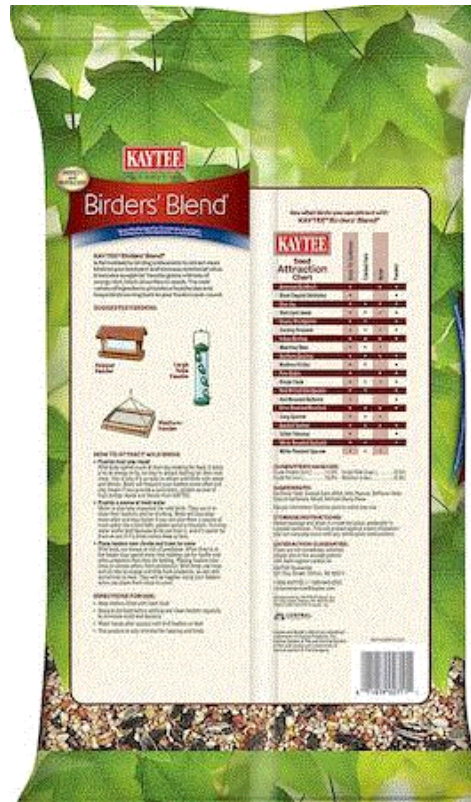
Oh, and let's not forget about the sponsors! They would be The Garden Center Group for the Young Retailer Award, Ball Horticultural for the Young Grower Award and AmericanHort for both awards. Can't do it without you!



Bird Food Recall

There's been a voluntary recall of one lot of bird food. The Kaytee Wild Bird Food Birders Blend in the 8-lb. bag is the bird food in question. Actually, there's no question about it, because it's been shown to have potentially elevated levels of Aflatoxin, levels that are above the acceptable limit. While naturally occurring, Aflatoxin, a by-products from the growth of *Aspergillus flavus*, can be harmful to wild birds if consumed in significant quantities. No birds have reported been sickened by this product yet. Doesn't mean they couldn't take ill if the product remains on the shelves.

To better determine if you might have product from this particular lot in your store, look for 0 71859 02711 1, Lot Number PennPak1 102022 933, best buy date of 041224. To read up on what the FDA has to say about it, head over [HERE](#). This is what the label looks like.



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



Acres of buZZ! from CAST

It's also spring out in California. The California Spring Trials won't be deterred by raindrops, that's for sure. The Bobbleheads—which is now a quartet—are headed out to do their thing next week; their “thing” being researching, reporting and recapping each day of the CAST tour.



You will see those daily reports in *Acres of buZZ!* for five straight days beginning on Wednesday, March 29. Each of the five newsletters will feature their observations, plenty of photos, and links to as many videos as Osvaldo can edit and post to YouTube. If you're reading this email, you'll automatically get *Acres of buZZ!*

I am very excited to see what is new for this and next year. Most of all I am looking forward to their very entertaining blooper reel, as this year the woman with an amazing saying for pretty much any circumstance, Jen Zurko, will be joining Chris with the on-camera reporting. Stay tuned.



Fifteen and Counting!

This week marks 15 years of me writing *buZZ!* Can you believe it? Since March 2008, I have penned this garden retail-focused newsletter approximately 720 times—and I still haven't run out of things to say. It's gone from a subscription base of roughly 8,000 to now nearly 25,000, which makes me believe that some of you find the information here valuable enough to pass it along to friends and colleagues. I appreciate that. And keep it up.

Did you know I write a few other things, too? Take a look and sign up if you'd like more of me.

- *Tropical Topics*, a twice-monthly Ball Publishing publication focusing on houseplants, foliage and tropicals.
- *Food & Flower Ink*, my own consumer weekly listing three new things for your home and garden. Drops every Friday.
- *Food & Flower Ink via LinkedIn*, my short synopsis of the above newsletter with a bit of relevant commentary as an introduction. Drops every Friday.

Turns out newsletter writing is my thing, and I have Bossman Beytes and Ball Publishing to thank for that particular revelation. Shall we try for 1,000?

Questions, comments, suggestions? Drop me a line if you'd like at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



Ellen Wells
Senior Editor
Green Profit

This week's BuZZ! was sent to 24,815 loyal readers!

If you're interested in advertising on BuZZ! contact [Kim Brown](#) ASAP!

The Only Magazine
GROWERS AND RETAILERS FLIP OVER.