

# Celebrating (if that's the right term) 20 years of Acres Online



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## GrowerTalks' Acres Online

News and Commentary from GrowerTalks Magazine

### COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- It was 20 years ago today ...
- How it all started
- That first AO, reprinted
- Free webinar on GH logistics!
- MSU lighting workshop
- Finally ...

**NEW FOR 2027**



**PW**  
PROVEN WINNERS

**It was 20 years ago today ...**



Well, almost. It was 20 years ago on December 3 when I sent you the first edition of *Acres Online*. I never marked the occasion in my diary or journal or got a tattoo because I never guessed I'd still be writing it 20 years later. So at some point the date of the very first AO (as I abbreviate it) was lost to history.

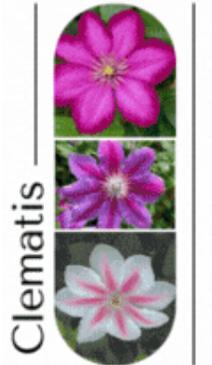
Thank goodness for the [Wayback Machine](#). The Wayback Machine is not just a clever device used by [Mr. Peabody and his boy, Sherman](#), on the old "Rocky & Bullwinkle Show." It's also a website that lets you dig up ancient online artifacts that you thought were gone forever.

Case in point: The very first *Acres Online*.

Some years back, I got curious about exactly when I sent the very first edition of this newsletter you've been reading for so long. So I called up the Wayback Machine, better known as [archive.org](#) and searched for it. Amazingly, it was there, and I learned that I sent Vol. 1, Issue 1 on December 3, 2003, a date that this time I put in my Outlook calendar so that when its anniversary rolled around, I could make mention of it. That first issue went to about 3,000 recipients, most of whom were in the U.S. This one will go to 26,928 folks in 66 countries. I should note that at one time, I reached 68 countries, but I was forced to delete my seven loyal readers in Iran and North Korea or face the wrath of the State Department ...

How many issues have I written and sent in 20 years? Let's calculate.

I send four per month, 48 per year, missing only a very few sends in that time (purely from oversight or miscounting, not from having nothing to say or no time or desire to say it). That would be about 960. I've also sent quite a few extra editions, like the three-times-per-year *River Ridge Report*, which has become a sponsored stand-alone email. And for important breaking news I'll send out an *Acres Online Special Edition*. But all told, I reckon I've written and sent about 1,000 of these things.



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And from all over the world, too, reporting "almost live" (as I often put it) from wherever I happen to be: [Alaska](#), [South Africa](#), [New Zealand](#), [Taiwan](#), [Tasmania](#), [Japan](#), [China](#). Europe on too many occasions to count. Then there was that time I [interviewed a king](#) and made it onto the Dutch nightly news.

Let's just say that being editor of this newsletter, and editor of *GrowerTalks*, has opened up some amazing doors. Here are a few:



In South Africa, the most efficient greenhouse employee I've ever met.



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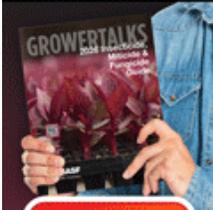
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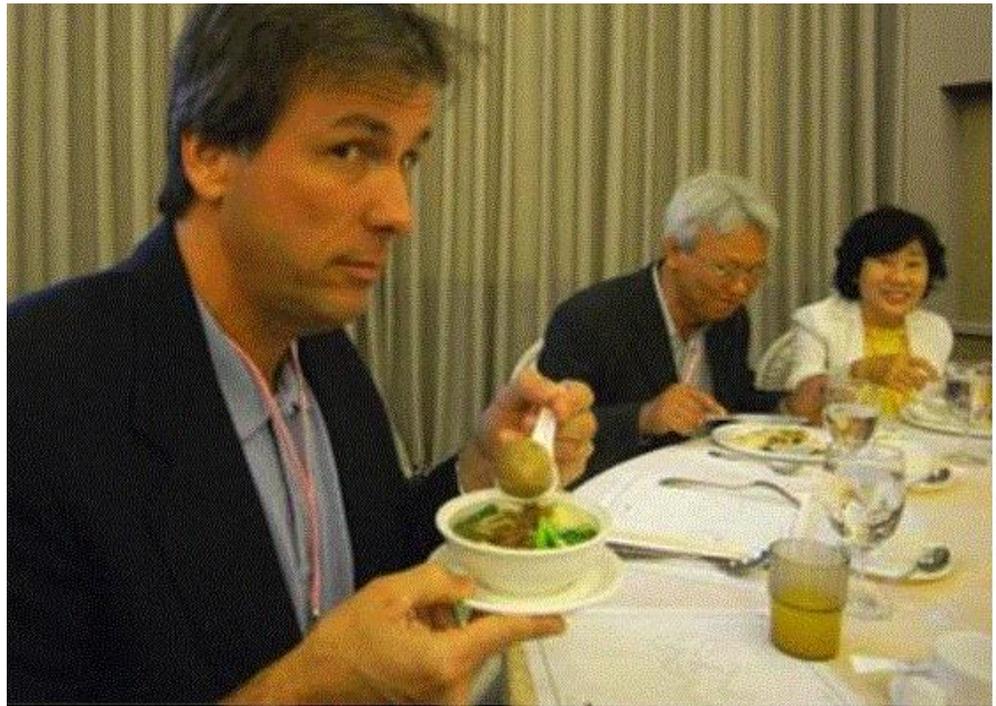
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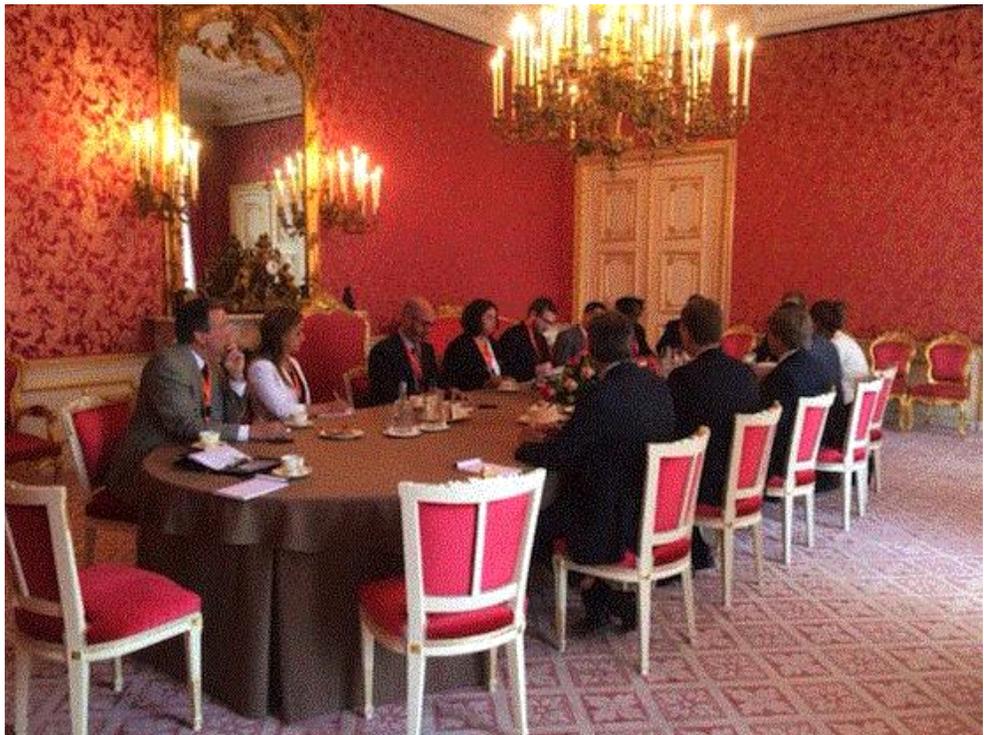
So-called "100-year-old eggs" for breakfast in Taiwan.



Looking devilishly handsome in the required safety vest in Tasmania.



On the radio with Tony Briscoe, host of Australia's oldest radio program, "Country Hour."



On my best behavior while in the presence of a king ... while wondering if I should eat the royal cookies (I did).



## How it all started

Humbly would be the correct answer. And with no clue what it would become.

In 2003, e-newsletters were just starting to become a thing and my boss at the time, Diane Blazek, thought I should start one. But what about? My competitors were already typing up and sending out press releases, so I didn't want to do that—I'm not that good at typing. So I mulled it over, but did nothing.

Then came a particularly busy month for news. It was late November and I'd just sent the December issue to the printer, and all of a sudden some big news came out about Zelenka Nursery being saved from liquidation by a new owner. Also, I'd just come back from a big trip to the Netherlands. With print, I wouldn't be able to tell you about that until the January issue, which you'd receive in five or six weeks.

"Aha!" I thought as a little idea lightbulb flickered to life above my head. "This is the kind of stuff that I could put in an e-newsletter—all the horticultural news that happens between each print issue."



The image shows the header and main content of the first issue of Acres Online. The header features the 'GrowerTalks' logo in a large, stylized font. Below the logo is a navigation bar with links: Ball Publishing | Ball Bookshelf | FloraCulture International | Green Profit | GrowerTalks | Conferences. On the left side, there is a vertical menu with links: Acres Online, Article Archive, Classifieds, Current Issue, Industry Calendar, Videos, Advertisers, Subscribe, and Contact Us. The main content area is titled 'Acres Online Vol. 1 No. 1' and is attributed to 'by Chris Beytes'. There is a small photo of Chris Beytes. Below the photo, it says 'A weekly news and commentary service of GrowerTalks magazine', 'December 3, 2003', and 'Vol 1 Issue 1'. The main heading is 'Happy Holidays!'. The text below reads: 'What is this? More spam? We hope not. It's GrowerTalks' new weekly e-mail column, Acres Online. If you're familiar with Acres & Acres, my monthly column on the inside back page of GT, you know I try to blend wit and wisdom to make a point about where the industry is headed. I'll be doing the same thing here, once a week, offering my take on the latest news and views coming across my desk. Don't worry, it won't be a rehash of dull press releases. It'll be a weekly answer to the most common question I get: "Chris, what are you hearing out there?"' Another paragraph says: 'Note that I said weekly. However, editorial schedules being what they are, I may get the every-Wednesday e-mail out on Thursday. Or Friday. Who knows. I suspect you have better things to do than wait with baited breath for my next words of wisdom.' The final paragraph says: 'Whether or not this is spam is for you to decide. If this e-mail takes up space in your inbox that could be better used for other purposes, just send back an "unsubscribe" message and we'll expunge you from our list, no questions asked. The last thing we want to do it waste your valuable time.'

So I wrote up the first one, we sent it to about 3,000 email addresses we had and the rest is history. We had no advertising back then, of course. But now *Acres Online* and our other nine newsletters (10 counting *Acres of buZZ!* from Spring Trials) make up a goodly percentage of our annual revenues. So thank you to my loyal advertisers, some of which have been with me since almost the very beginning!

For a fun, quick read, below is that very first *Acres Online* from December 3, 2003, just as I penned it. Enjoy!



## Happy Holidays!

What is this? More spam? We hope not. It's *GrowerTalks'* new weekly email column, *Acres Online*. If you're familiar with *Acres & Acres*, my monthly column on the inside back page of *GT*, you know I try to blend wit and wisdom to make a point about where the industry is headed. I'll be doing the same thing here, once a week, offering my take on the latest news and views coming across my desk. Don't worry, it won't be a rehash of dull press releases. It'll be a weekly answer to the most common question I get: "Chris, what are you hearing out there?"

Note that I said weekly. However, editorial schedules being what they are, I may get the every-Wednesday email out on Thursday. Or Friday. Who knows? I suspect you have better things to do than wait with bated breath for my next words of wisdom.

Whether or not this is spam is for you to decide. If this email takes up space in your inbox that could be better used for other purposes, just send back an "unsubscribe" message and we'll expunge you from our list, no questions asked. The last thing we want to do is waste your valuable time.

To unsubscribe simply reply to this e-mail and add "unsubscribe" to the subject or send an e-mail to [unsubscribe@growertalks.com](mailto:unsubscribe@growertalks.com).

But if you find this informative, useful or even just a mildly entertaining way to put off doing some real work, let me know and I'll keep the news and views coming your way. Hey, sign up your friends!

And now for something completely different.

## The latest news

It's been like Lake Wobegon out there lately: quiet. I guess everybody's too busy with poinsettias to make news. The biggest I've heard lately is that Zelenka has been saved from shutting down by a new owner, Judkins Nursery of Tennessee. This is big news because Zelenka has 600 employees and thousands of acres of production in three states. They ran into financial trouble when their banks decided to suddenly empty the company's bank accounts and asked that all assets be handed over for liquidation.

I talked to Judkins CFO Dave Watt in November and he called the purchase "a fantastic deal," adding that the addition of Zelenka's sales should double Judkins' sales to \$120 million. That's some serious business in trees, woodyies and perennials!

## Poinsettias

Here in the Midwest, retail prices are certainly stronger than last year, thanks to the big boxes holding the line at \$3.33 for 6-in. pots, compared with \$2 last year. Maybe my pleas about the horror of five for \$10 poinsettias hit home?

Quality varies from poor to average, although I saw some above-average \$3.33 plants at Depot in southern Wisconsin over the weekend from FloriCulture Inc. Nice work!

Not that Depot hasn't had its fun: On the Friday after Thanksgiving, they ran a one-day special in Chicagoland with 6-in. poinsettias for \$1.66. I heard a report just a few minutes ago that one customer refused to buy at Depot until they went back on sale. Will prices hold the rest of the season? Don't hold your breath because I heard rumor that we might see below-\$2 poinsettias in other markets.

Keep me posted on what's happening in your area and what you think about it. Contributing editor Lena Fenton hit the northwest and Purdue's trial in the company of Allen Hammer. I'll tell you what she saw next time.

As for varieties, it looks like 90% red, a smattering of colors, and for novelties it's Winter Rose Red. I've seen almost no Burgundy or Plum Pudding, Monet or any other "premium" colors at the big boxes. Which is good, in my view. At \$3.33, there's no need to give a customer any more choice than red, white or pink.

Oh, and just so you know: Dutch poinsettia growers lose money on poinsettias, too. I visited three of them in November and two of the three admitted they use poinsettias to cover their overhead. The third claimed to make money. His prices were about 20 cents higher than the other guys, so maybe he does, but it's not much.

## Travel Report

My latest travel was to Horti Fair in Amsterdam and also the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers (ASCFG) in Vancouver (where I gave talks on hiring and motivating great employees, and tracking the hot trends).

The hot news in Holland is cut flower automation. They're looking for ways to move the cut flower plants through the greenhouse and bring them to the workers, rather than the workers having to walk the greenhouse. The hope is that this will make Dutch cuts competitive again with offshore cuts from Colombia, Ecuador and Kenya. We're also seeing slow-but-sure development in vegetative cutting automation. It's still slow and it's still expensive, but some pot rose guys are investing millions in the technology, which seems to be coming not from horticulture, but from the true robotics industry. Read about it in the January *GrowerTalks*.

In specialty cuts, the news is that more and more growers and even retailers are looking at them as alternatives to bedding and pot plants. We've even heard of a big California pot plant grower who's looking at shifting into cut flowers! We suspect we'll be hearing more university research on the subject of producing specialty cuts as summer and fall crops in your bedding plant facility.

## Key to success: Know WHY

On a final note, I've been doing some thinking about the big changes taking place in our industry, many of which are being forced upon you by your customers or your competitors. I've reached the conclusion that there are three levels of change available:

1. You have to know WHAT to do.
2. You have to know HOW to do it.
3. You have to know WHY you're doing it.

The most successful businesses I know accept the first two levels as a given. They've figured out—from the boss down to the newest employees—that most-critical third level.

Anyway, that's it for this week. As always, feedback is always appreciated. Email me at [beytes@growertalks.com](mailto:beytes@growertalks.com).

And, remember, there's nothing more embarrassing than breaking your neck putting up Christmas lights! Be careful out there!

Best regards,

Chris Beytes  
Editor  
*GrowerTalks*

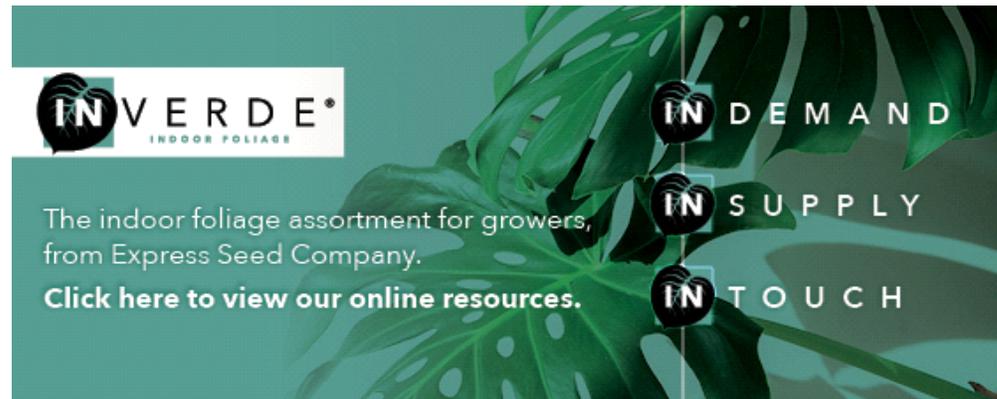
*That was it, short and sweet. Who knew it would turn into 20 years!*

*A few things have changed in that time. I'm 20 years older and a lot grayer. Jen Zurko now wields*

the "editor" title (I'm editor-in-chief, for what it's worth). My computer is a whole lot faster and it goes with me everywhere. As does my phone, which also serves as camera and GPS.

As for how many more years I'll be doing this? You keep telling me what's going on and I'll keep writing about it!

On that note ... what's going on? Any news you want to share? Questions you want answered? Burning issues to get off your chest? Email me at that same address you used in 2003: [beytes@growertalks.com](mailto:beytes@growertalks.com).



## Free webinar on greenhouse logistics

Don't miss out on our next free *GrowerTalks* webinar, which is TOMORROW! That's Thursday, December 7, at 1:00 p.m. Eastern/Noon Central.

The topic?

### Overcoming the challenges of logistics planning for greenhouse production

In this webinar, Berger purchasing and supply chain supervisor Fanny Laliberté will share some of her best practices and practical tools that can help improve the efficiency of your operation. She'll talk about "adapting management to stay competitive in a changing external environment" and will present three components of logistics:

- Managing external partners
- Inventory management
- Project management

Fanny has a bachelor's degree in marketing and international business, and a master's degree in global supply chain, so she definitely knows her stuff! As Berger's Director of Purchasing & Supply Chain, she oversees and manages the procurement and logistics, ensuring efficient sourcing, inventory management and supplier relationships to support the company's strategic goals. She'll share strategies that can help YOU do the same for your organization.

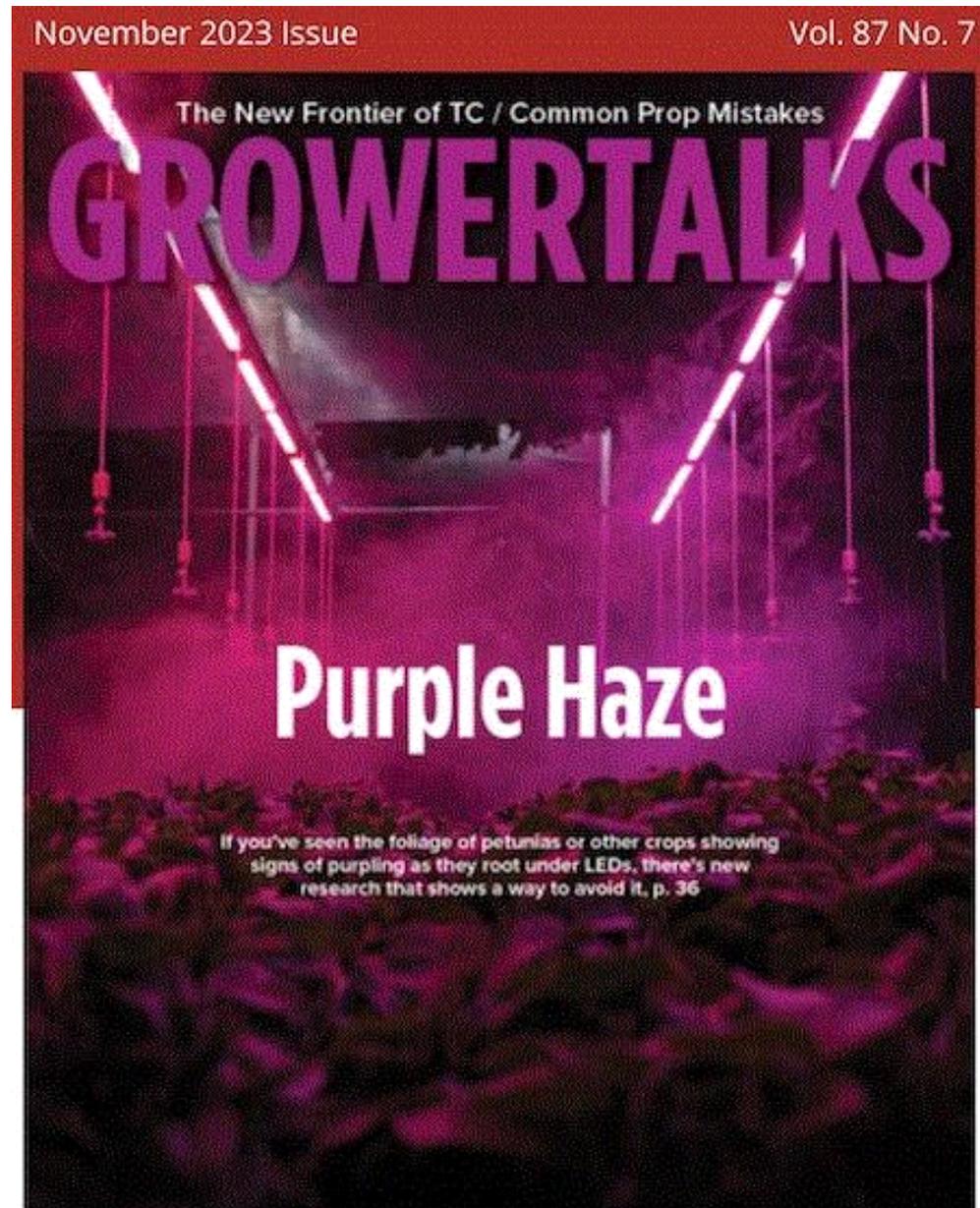
Sign up now [HERE](#).

See you there!



## Lighting workshop at MSU

With the advent of LEDs, the topic of supplemental greenhouse lighting has come to the fore, both for those curious about replacing their existing HPS lights and those who've never lit a crop but think now may be the time to do so. (One reason LEDs were featured as [our November cover story](#).)



Whichever camp you inhabit, Michigan State University's upcoming **"Horticultural Lighting Workshop"** is for you. It's slated for Monday, December 18, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. This is not a virtual event—it's live and on campus and limited to the first 75 folks who register. And at just \$65, it's a college-level bargain! (You even get morning refreshments, lunch and a tour!)

Your instructors are four lighting experts: Drs. Erik Runkle and Roberto Lopez from MSU, Dan McMahon from Philips Lighting, and Nathan Jahnke from Ball Horticultural Company. They'll be presenting the following topics:

- Light concepts, principles and terms for horticulture
- Indoor sole-source lighting of seedlings and leafy greens
- Indoor lighting of tissue culture propagules

- Photoperiodic lighting to regulate flowering
- Supplemental greenhouse lighting
- Using LEDs to decrease PGR use
- Lighting approaches: Selection of fixtures, lighting plans and other application considerations

That's a lot for the price! To register, click [HERE](#). But act fast—the deadline is December 12!



## Finally ...

IGOTY finalists named ... and none are from the U.S. or Canada ... sob!

Still, a good field of top businesses has been named for the upcoming 2024 International Grower of the Year Award, to be held during IPM Essen January 23. They are:

- Beyond Chrysant (the Netherlands)
- Fitoralia (Spain)
- Greenwood Plants (UK)
- Guangzhou Flower Research Center (China)
- Huverba BV (the Netherlands)
- Kwekerij Dirk Mermans (Belgium)
- Sjaak van Schie B.V. /Jacobus van Schie, Unip. Lda. (the Netherlands/Portugal)
- Yunnan Shining Flora Co., Ltd. (China)
- Yunnan Yunxiu Flower Co., Ltd. (China)

Organized by the International Association of Horticultural Producers (AIPH) in collaboration with Host Sponsor IPM Essen and Founding Partner *FloraCulture International (FCI)*, the awards recognize the “best of the best” in ornamentals production.

I told you last time that for the first time since 2016 I will NOT be hosting the event. I just learned my successors are both friends of mine: Michael Perry (aka Mr. Plant Geek) and Sirekit Mol, head of commercial operations for Beekenkamp Plants. I'm sure they'll do a fine job tag-teaming the hosting duties—and look sensational doing it! And for the first time in seven years, I won't have to pack my good suit and bow tie and spend a trade show day in rehearsals! Or worry about pronouncing those foreign business names!

Congrats to all the finalists and good luck! Chances are I'll be in the audience ready to reveal the winners to the world.





Feel free to email me at [beytes@growertalks.com](mailto:beytes@growertalks.com) if you have ideas, comments or questions.

See you next time,

**Chris Beytes**  
Editor-in-Chief  
*GrowerTalks and Green Profit*

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