

Adding space, LiveTrends + Sustee and be a cool judge



The logo for the Tropical Plant International Expo 2027 is displayed in a horizontal banner. On the left, the acronym 'TPIE' is enclosed in a double-bordered orange square. To its right, the text 'TROPICAL PLANT INTERNATIONAL EXPO 2027 FT. LAUDERDALE' is written in a dark brown, sans-serif font. On the far right, the dates 'JAN 20-22' are shown in large, white, bold letters against a gradient orange background.



A blue horizontal bar contains the text 'News and Inspiration from the world of foliage and tropical plants' on the left. On the right side of the bar are two logos: 'GROWERTALKS MAGAZINE' and 'greenPROFIT MAGAZINE'.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2024

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TROPICAL TOPICS

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- The Plant Company Adds Space
- LiveTrends & Sustee
- Speaking of Cool Products
- Doing Good

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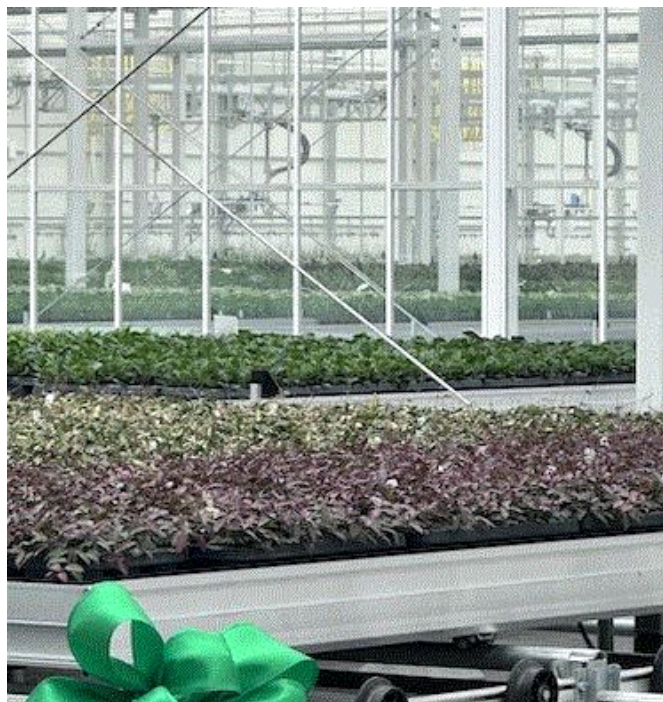
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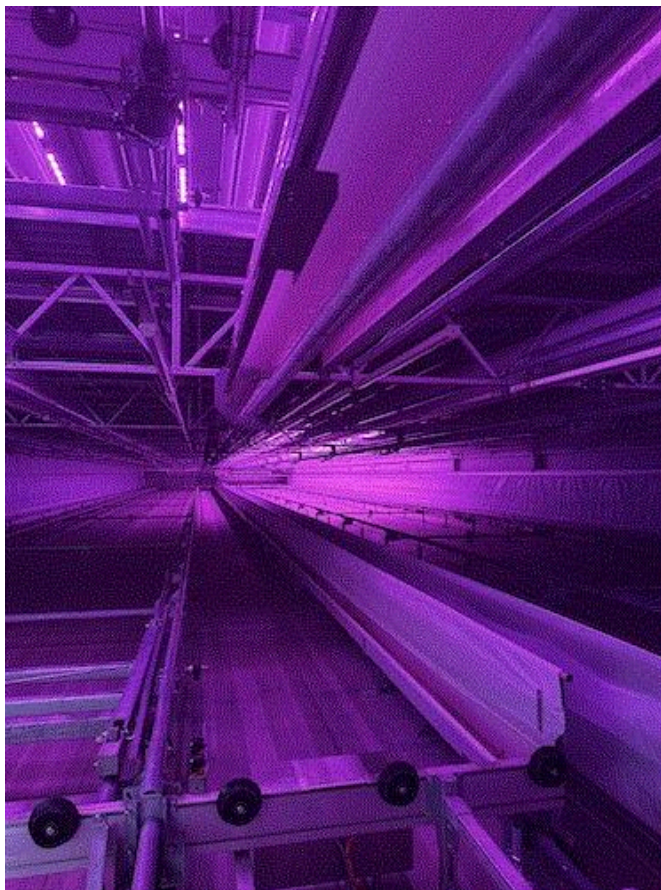
The Plant Company Adds Space

Whoever said the houseplant boom had ended must have gotten it wrong. Business is so good that The Plant Company is adding 5 acres of state-of-the-art greenhouses to keep up with demand for Proven Winners leafy houseplants. This expansion will essentially allow the Stuarts Draft, Virginia—based grower to double its output. (You can read more about the beginnings of the operation in the *GrowerTalks* cover story from December 2023 [HERE](#).)





The new space will be used for expanding both the liner and finished plant sides of the business. And with the way it's set up, The Plant Company projects it'll be increasing labor efficiency by about 20%. The space is engineered to improve ergonomics and reduce labor with a fully automated internal transport system that moves containers to the correct place in the multilayer rooting chamber. The company has also invested in new automation and energy-saving technology that improves space usage by 10-15% and concentrates the handling of plants for more efficient sticking, sorting and shipping.



The two-story rooting chamber.

And that's not all. They've incorporated some new technology that addresses both energy and sustainability issues. For example, a PAR Perfect shade curtain and double energy curtain reduce electric inputs, and 100% recirculation of irrigation water reduces water usage.



Water is reclaimed and reused to help reduce water usage.

The system also includes CO2 injection from a high-efficiency boiler system. The new boom system allows for more precise watering of liners with automated spray to keep conditions ideal for rooting. They've also included two electric air handling units with heat pump technology to cool, heat and dehumidify the air. The advanced LED system adjusts the light spectra per track, optimizing plant growth speed, quality and uniformity based on species and growth stage. And integrated IIVO climate control software monitors all processes and alerts the grower when abnormalities occur in the growth process.

Whew, that's a lot of tech they've integrated! The Plant Company got some help with all that, of course. They worked with the folks at GreenV group, specifically HT Verboom and Prins USA to design an internal logistics system that improves overall operations. "This new technology serves our needs today, but also looks to the future, accounting for expansion and automation," said Frank Paul, co-founder and COO of The Plant Company.

The Plant Company hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony on October 22 to celebrate the new space, with Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Matthew Lohr, State House Representative Ben Cline, Augusta County Administrator Timothy Fitzgerald and Rural Development State Director Perry Hickman in attendance.



Jason vanWingerden and Frank Paul, co-founders of The Plant Company, with a couple of feisty kids with really big scissors.



LiveTrends Partners with Sustee

If the Sustee name sounds familiar but you just can't place it, let me remind you that the Tokyo-based company makes moisture sensors. You may also recall that their products have won several Cool New Product and Retailers Choice Awards from various trade shows. And deservedly so. The old-school technology—it uses a wicking action and color change to indicate when plants need watering—is refreshing in its simplicity. I have several—and I love them!

The folks at LiveTrends Design Group love them, too. So much so that they have entered an exclusive distribution partnership with the company for the North American mass market. A press release on the partnership said the collaboration will unite Sustee's patented technology with LiveTrends' design expertise and market reach, "bringing accessible plant care tools to millions of consumers." You know, I always say (at least to myself) planting a plant is one thing, but caring for it is quite another. If there's a way you can increase customer success post-planting, you should offer it. These moisture sensors are one of those ways.



"We're excited about partnering with Sustee because of their straightforward, 'analog' design and exceptional value," said Bisser Georgiev, CEO of LiveTrends Design Group, in that press release. "The sensor turns white when watering is needed, removing the hassle of complex apps or costly devices. We believe this sensor will empower millions to enjoy greater success with their plants at home."

The products will be co-branded with Sustee and LiveTrends labels and shipped from LiveTrends' North American facilities. Bisser said they'll come with some very cool packaging and a story about the product. "The idea is to have a simple, affordable and totally analog solution to watering. It takes the guess work out of watering and encourages consumers to confidently purchase live plants ... with reduced fear of killing them."



About those wicks—their lifespan is about 12 months. Replacement wicks are available for folks like me who replace rather than dispose. Those wicks will be available on the LiveTrends website soon, too.

Pre-orders are available now for shipping to retailers in early Spring 2025. Interested? Drop them a note about it [HERE](#).



Speaking of Cool Products

The Garden Center Group's Danny Summers wants you to know that if you are attending the Tropical Plant International Expo January 22-24 in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, you are welcome to sign up to be a member of the Cool Product Awards judging group. They are looking for garden retailers with an eye for products that'll fly off the benches and shelves (like a moisture sensor, for example) or products that'll help retailers sell more (like a new cart).



As a judging retailer, you'll walk the show on Wednesday, January 22, at your own pace then meet others at the end of the day to share details of what you discovered and see what everyone else found as well. Cool Product Award Judges receive a special code for a **free** Show Badge in your confirmation email. Register to be a judge [HERE](#). Then take your special code over to [HERE](#) to receive your free TPIE 2025 badge.



Doing Good

When a company does something good for someone else, I like to talk about it. There's so much cynicism circling around us (thanks, internet) so when I hear of good deeds, it's nice to spread the news as a "look at that, good people *do* still exist" message.

The company doing good is Westerlay Orchids. They teamed up with Albertsons in October to support breast cancer resource centers. Westerlay and Albertsons donated \$2 of every Pink Gemstone orchid sold at Albertsons to the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center Seattle division and The Stanford Cancer Research Fund.



"We've been proud to work alongside Albertsons to be able to provide a generous donation from these unique pink orchids," said Westerlay president Toine Overgaag in a press release. "The Pink Gemstone is uniquely vibrant and a beautiful reminder of brightness, beauty, and hope."

All told, 9,260 Pink Gemstones were sold at Albertsons during the month of October. That makes the total donation going to these two cancer centers \$18,520. They didn't have to run this campaign, yet they did and raised a good deal of money for a good cause. Kudos to you for doing good, Westerlay and Albertsons.

Do you have a good-news story? Of *course* you do! I would love to share it with the hort community. Drop me a note about your good works [HERE](#).

Comments, questions, suggestions? Email me about them at ewells@ballpublishing.com.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen".

Ellen Wells
Senior Editor
Green Profit

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