

Growing in Peat/Wood Fiber; Easter Lily Miracle; Valkaria Gardens



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

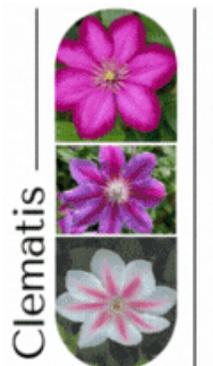
- Peat/wood fiber live stream
- Congrats to YGA, YRA finalists!
- PW certifies your employees
- New Easter lily is a Miracle
- Grants for hort educators
- Must-see flower festivals
- SAF calls for nominations
- Finally ...

NEW FOR 2027



PW
PROVEN WINNERS

Don't forget our growing in peat and wood fiber live stream!

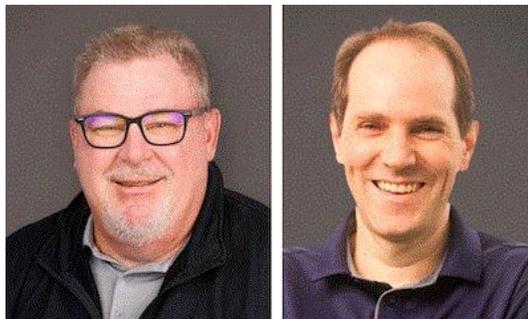


There's no time like now to learn how potting mixes that combine peat moss AND wood fiber will work for you—how they're similar and how they're different from your current mix.

"Adjusting Growing Practices When Transitioning to Peat/Wood Fiber Mixes" will tell you just that: how to adjust your growing practices—including your initial hydration, your irrigation strategies, managing your dry-down cycles and more.

It's TOMORROW: **Wednesday, March 19** at 1:00 p.m. Eastern/Noon Central.

My guest experts for this one are from peat company Berger. Kevin Cooper is a grower advisor at Berger with more than 30 years of industry experience, including head grower, greenhouse owner and technical advisor. And François-Simon Robert is an R&D project manager at Berger, specializing in wood fiber optimization, soft fruit substrates and precision agriculture, with expertise in soil sciences and horticultural production. François-Simon will cover the science of the topic, while Kevin will report on real-world use and experiences.



Sign up now at growertalks.com/LiveStreams. Don't miss it!

Oh, while you're there, also sign up for our May 1 live stream, "**Greenhouse Trends 2025: Smarter, More Sustainable & Cost-Effective Growing.**" It will feature guest expert Felix Chassouant, Vice President of Sales—Poly Greenhouses for Harnois Greenhouses.



Congrats to our Young Grower, Young Retailer finalists!

Well, once again we Ball Publishing editors locked ourselves in a room with strong coffee and multiple colors of highlighter, discussed and argued and pled and cajoled, and somehow managed to boil down dozens of outstanding applications to three finalists for the *GrowerTalks*/Ball Horticultural Company Young Grower Award and three for the *Green Profit*/The Garden Center Group Young Retailer Award. They are:

Young Grower Award:

- Isabela Chamorro**, Mahoney's Garden Center—Woburn, Massachusetts
- Ginger Thurston**, Spring Meadow Nursery—Grand Haven, Michigan
- Daniel Villegas**, Van Belle Nursery—Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada

Young Retailer Award:

- Krista Devor**, Lukas Nursery & Butterfly Encounter—Oviedo, Florida
- Haley Martin**, B.B. Barns Inc.—Arden, North Carolina
- Brandon Kirby**, Rainbow Gardens—San Antonio, Texas

Next up for these six as they get busy with spring? Write a 700-word guest essay for the June issues of our magazines AND do phone interviews with our expert judges, who will pick the two winners of the title. This July, the finalists will be our guests at Cultivate'25 where they'll enjoy a

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We create chemistry

private dinner with industry notables, then parade off up the street to Unplugged, where we'll announce the winners who'll see themselves profiled in the September issues of our *GrowerTalks* and *Green Profit*.

Picking the finalists is tough, but also gratifying, as it lets us know there are plenty of young (under 35) people who are passionate about their careers as growers or retailers. Our goal is to reward them and share their passion with the industry.



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Proven Winners Certified Garden Center Training

Speaking of retail, to help you IGCs prepare for spring, Proven Winners is once again offering its [Certified Garden Center Training Program](#) to provide the knowledge and know-how your employees need. In less than an hour, your staff will learn key information about new plants, programs and solutions to help them inspire and educate your customers.

Over more than 20 years, thousands of garden centers have participated in the Certified program by watching the training video and answering the accompanying questions. And 98% of employees who took Certified training in the past said they would take it again and recommend it to a co-worker.



Malara Gardens got certified—how about you and your team?

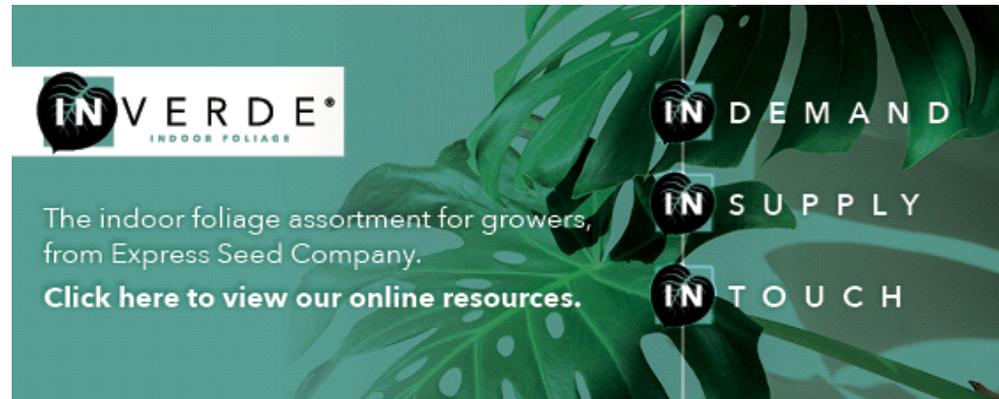
Along with vital education, news and tips, Certified garden centers receive:

- Priority listing on provenwinners.com through the Find a Retailer tool
- Their choice of a t-shirt, hat or POP credit for each staff member who completes the program
- A pizza party courtesy of Proven Winners to celebrate their accomplishments
- Access to Proven Winners' professional photo library

This year's training video is available with closed captioning in English, Spanish and French. And the video is now divided into chapters, allowing viewers to easily jump from topic to topic to find the information they need.

"We know that trained teams are more confident, provide their customers with the right solutions and sell more products," said Jessica DeGraaf, director of retail accounts. "But we also know that one of the biggest struggles garden centers face is staff education. Finding the time and resources to train team members each spring can be a challenge. That's why we created the Certified training program more than 20 years ago—to support garden centers and help them set their staff up for success."

Click [HERE](#) to learn how you and your team can get Certified this spring.



New Easter lily is a Miracle

Well, literally: it's named Miracle and it's the first new Easter lily on the market in ... well, I don't know how long. Miracle is from LilyLooks Holland, where the breeder has been doing R&D for the past 10 years to "rescue" the Easter lily market. I learned about Miracle from Ko Klaver of [Zabo Plant USA](#), who last week told me of his son's adventure as owner of an Alaska peony farm. He also mentioned Miracle, so I asked for more details.

Ko has been selling Easter lily bulbs in the U.S. since 1990, and all that time the only variety was the venerable Nellie White and a few other varieties that have come and gone over that time.

"Seeing major challenges in the current production of Easter lilies, we felt strongly that it was time to renew and to refresh this product segment," said Ko.



The objectives were easy production, a uniform crop, a clean bulb input for a clean-finishing, healthy potted crop at a price that the grower can make a good margin with. After seven years of commercial trials, Ko said they've achieved that. The bulbs are being produced in the Netherlands, vernalized and case-cooled, and then shipped to North America for planting in December.



"We are confident, based on our recent travels, that we have met these benchmarks and will bring the potted Easter lily to the next level with Miracle, bringing a high-quality Easter plant to the American consumer," he said.

Go [HERE](#) to learn more.



Grants to help educators teach the power of plants

[Seed Your Future](#) (SYF), the leading force in educating and inspiring the next generation about the diverse and rewarding career opportunities in horticulture, knows how important it is for youth to be introduced to the power of plants. But costs often are a restriction for educators who want to open up the plant world to their students.

That's why they've put together a [Plant Education Grants Resource](#) to inspire the next generation and get them thinking of ways they can use plants to solve problems.

SYF has searched charitable organizations and corporations and compiled a resource to help educators find grant sources to fund plant education. They've also included a feature that allows anyone to add a new grant to the resource and keep the clearinghouse up to date.

There are currently more than 40 grant sources listed, with more to come. They include a wide range of organizations and companies, including the American Heart Association, Bonnie Plants, KidsGardening.org, MIT, National FFA, Target, Toyota, Walmart, the Scotts Miracle-Gro Foundation and many more.

Access these educator grants [HERE](#).



Must-See Flower Festivals

I know that springtime is not the best time for you to escape your greenhouse to visit a flower festival, but just in case you need a break and can grab a Saturday or a weekend, these are the 10 best flower festivals in America, as selected by *USA Today's* panel of experts and voted on by *USA Today* readers:

10. Thomasville Rose Show and Festival

Thomasville, Georgia

April 25-26

At this Annual Rose Show, visitors can marvel at breathtaking displays of roses in a multitude of colors and styles. Beyond roses, Orchids on Parade offers a glimpse of orchids thriving in their natural habitat and the Annual Standard Flower Show showcases a litany of exquisite floral art exhibits. Attendees can enjoy lively parades, live music, family friendly activities and food vendors serving Southern delights.

9. Portland Rose Festival

Portland, Oregon

May 25-June 7

With a history spanning over a century, the Portland Rose Festival is a beloved tradition celebrating the city's namesake flower. Attendees can marvel at the stunning rose displays at the Annual Spring Rose Show, the largest and longest-running rose show in the nation, and enjoy the iconic Grand Floral Parade featuring spectacular all-floral floats. The festival also features the city fair, live music, food vendors and a variety of family friendly activities.

8. PHS Philadelphia Flower Show

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

February 28-March 8, 2026

Hosted by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society since 1829, the Philadelphia Flower Show is the largest and longest-running horticultural event in the United States. The event features flower and garden displays, horticulture and floral arranging competitions, gardening presentations, and a massive marketplace where more than 150 vendors sell cut flowers, plants, garden tools and floral-themed crafts.

7. Skagit Valley Tulip Festival

Mount Vernon, Washington

April 1-30

During the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival, millions of tulips burst into bloom while local farmers invite visitors to tour their flower farms on foot. It's one of the state's biggest events—over a million visitors attend annually.



6. International Cherry Blossom Festival

Macon, Georgia

March 21-30

The International Cherry Blossom Festival in Macon, Georgia, celebrates the arrival of spring, when more than 350,000 Yoshino cherry trees burst into a beautiful display of color. Highlights of this 10-day festival include live music, a Food Truck Frenzy and the guest-favorite Cherry Blossom Parade.

5. Tulip Time

Holland, Michigan

May 2-11

Holland, Michigan, is an apt location for one of America's biggest tulip festivals: Tulip Time. Each year, some six million colorful tulips bloom in the city—there are over 200,000 of them in the downtown area alone. In addition to the floral festivities, Tulip Time celebrates Dutch heritage with music, dancing, an artisan market and parades.

4. Rochester Lilac Festival

Rochester, New York

May 9-18

The Rochester Lilac Festival is a free 10-day festival showcasing more than 500 varieties of blooming lilacs in Highland Park, a picturesque park designed by renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. Visitors can take guided tours to learn about the park's rich history and explore the largest collection of lilacs in North America. The festival also offers live music performances, the colorful Lilac Parade, an arts and crafts market, and food vendors serving seasonal fare.

3. Mackinac Island Lilac Festival

Mackinac Island, Michigan

June 6-15

The festival began as a way to entice visitors to the island with horse-drawn carriage rides amidst the island's fragrant flowers. Today, events include the coronation of the Lilac Queen, a 10K run/walk, lilac planting seminars, a cornhole tournament, live music and the popular Grand Parade.



2. Zoo Blooms at Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden

Cincinnati, Ohio

April 1-30

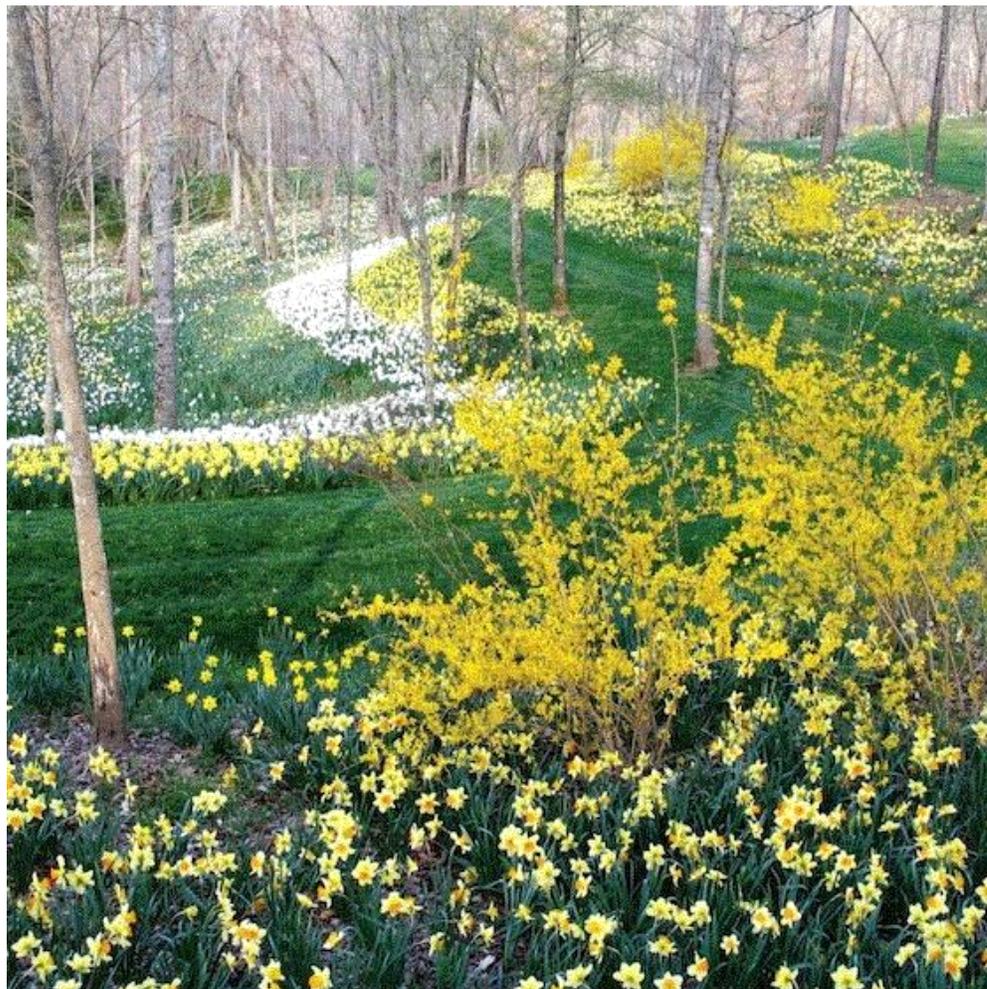
The Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, one of the few botanical gardens in Ohio, offers one of the largest tulip displays in the Midwest, featuring more than 100,000 tulips. Visitors can stroll amongst more than a million yellow and white daffodils, hyacinths, flowering trees, shrubs and various spring bulbs peeking out from their winter slumber.

1. Daffodil Festival at Gibbs Gardens

Ball Ground, Georgia

Late February through March

Spring begins at Gibbs Gardens as 20-plus million daffodil blooms adorn 50 acres of valleys, hillsides and fields across its 376 acres. Named one of "The World's 10 Best Places to See Daffodils" by *Flower Magazine*, Gibbs Gardens offers more than 60 daffodil varieties for six weeks of blooms in shades of yellow, orange, white, peach and deep gold.



SAF calls for award nominations

Know a worthy industry leader or rising star? You can nominate them for one of the Society of American Florists' (SAF) prestigious industry awards or professional certifications, which celebrate excellence, leadership and innovation in the floral industry. Honorees will be recognized during the Stars of the Industry Awards Experience at SAF Phoenix 2025, the organization's 140th annual convention, taking place August 11-14 in Scottsdale, Arizona.

But act fast! Nominations close April 1.

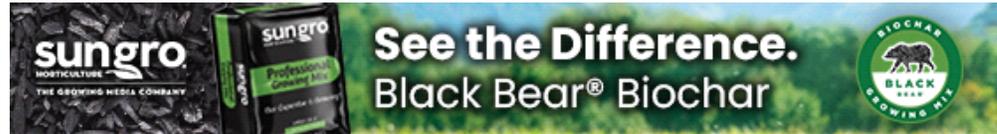
There's a wide range of awards available, including the Gold Medal Award, Century Award, Alex Laurie Award for Research and Education, Floriculture Hall of Fame, John H. Walker Award, Paul Ecke, Jr. Award, and Next Gen Rising Star Award.

"Recognizing excellence within our industry not only celebrates individual achievement, but also strengthens our community," said Leanne Kesler, education director of Floral Design Institute and recipient of the 2024 Tommy Bright Award. "A nomination is a powerful way to uplift and acknowledge the dedication, creativity and contributions of your peers."

Do you know someone who deserves to be recognized? Go [HERE](#) to submit a nomination and

celebrate the industry's finest!

And be sure to spell my last name correctly: B-e-y-t-e-s. ;)



Finally ...



If you find yourself on Interstate 95 in Florida just south of Melbourne and you have a little time, take exit 173 (Malabar Road) and make your way 4 miles south to [Valkaria Gardens](#). Laurie and I discovered it last week (they were exhibiting at the Leu Gardens Plant Sale I wrote about) and were absolutely floored by the tropical lushness and splendor of the place.

Just over 20 years old, the soaring palms and bamboo make it feel much more mature. It's designed in a tropical Southeast Asian style, with interesting buildings constructed from heavy poles and timbers. Each path brings you to a focal point, which in turn sends you off toward another interesting outdoor room or shady structure. Tons of color comes from bromelias, orchids and SunPatiens. There are loads of tropical foliage plants scattered throughout and in a large shadehouse out back. We purchased a very cool pedilanthus (devil's backbone) variety we'd never seen before.





The garden was founded in 1988 by Dr. B. Frank Brown and his friend and gardener Cleofar “Clay” Millare. Some of you will recognize Dr. Brown’s name; he hybridized and patented more than 20 aglaonemas and authored three books, including the first book ever on crotons. Interestingly, he wasn’t a trained horticulturist, he was an educator and superintendent of the Brevard County (Florida) schools. But after he retired, Dr. Brown traveled extensively to the jungles of Southeast Asia collecting exotic plants. He and Cleo opened Valkaria Gardens to the public in 2012. Dr. Brown passed away in 2014 at the age of 97.





Feel free to email me at beytes@growertalks.com if you have ideas, comments or questions.

See you next time!

Chi

Chris Beytes
Editor-in-Chief
GrowerTalks and Green Profit

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