

Farwest, The Landscape Show & More



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# Nursery & LANDSCAPE INSIDER

News and Commentary for the landscape and nursery market

## COMING UP THIS WEEK:

My Busy Week  
Hot Pots  
Soilless Substrates Science at Farwest  
Heading to the Landscape Show  
HRI Leadership Academy 2026  
Proven Winners Landscape



## Swell Week: My Cross-Country Travels

I have a very exciting, yet busy, trip coming up next week. Monday morning I will be off to Portland, Oregon, to attend Farwest, one of America's premier experiences for the nursery industry.

This isn't a show I get to attend every year, but when I do it's always a delight. I've spent my entire life in the Southeastern U.S. and I feel like I have a very solid grasp on production practices that are used by southern growers. It's a bit nuanced based on the specific location, but for the most part, it seems familiar.

However, when I travel out west, it's like a whole new ballgame. The substrates are different, the irrigation is different—all tailored for a dry, moderate climate. It's so exciting to visit growers and operations and explore the different practices that make this country's nursery industry so diverse. Plus, the plant pallet is quite fun.

As a scientist, I find my collaborations with my West Coast friends to be very insightful. Just yesterday, I was having conversations with Gerry Spinelli at the University of California-San Diego. We're planning some exciting nursery irrigation studies for next spring where we plan to evaluate the difference in a substrate's ability to rehydrate after irrigation between the wet south and the dry southwest. Not only are the applications going to be exhilarating, but the sheer scientific exploration should be enough to get anyone excited.

However, that's not the collaboration I'm most excited to discuss with you today. Instead, I want to give you a preview of my presentation at Farwest, which is on the collaborative efforts between Oregon State's Lloyd Nackley and myself surrounding substrate temperature modification.

Lloyd and I are part of a national team evaluating substrate temperature and tactics to mitigate extreme heat in the container to improve root health and development. Our team also includes USDA scientists Jake Shreckhise in Tennessee and Ohio State University Biophysicist Darren



Drewery. We recently published a paper where we modeled substrate temperature across the country. For the not faint of heart, you can read the paper [HERE](#), but I'll warn you in advance, this one is dense.

For those that just want CliffsNotes, we're applying machine learning to an overly developed network of environmental sensors across the country. This machine learning develops an algorithm with data that's able to predict extreme temperatures at least eight hours ahead of time with an over 80% success rate. Even cooler, we plan to take this concept and dumb it down to let this predictive model make these assessments based on your location with minimal input.

In essence, with a very cheap and turnkey sensor, you should be able to determine ahead of time when your containers will exceed dangerous temperature thresholds and allow you to combat those with irrigation. As we advance this research, I'll share more info with you here. For now, you might have to just read the paper—or come to our talk at Farwest ...



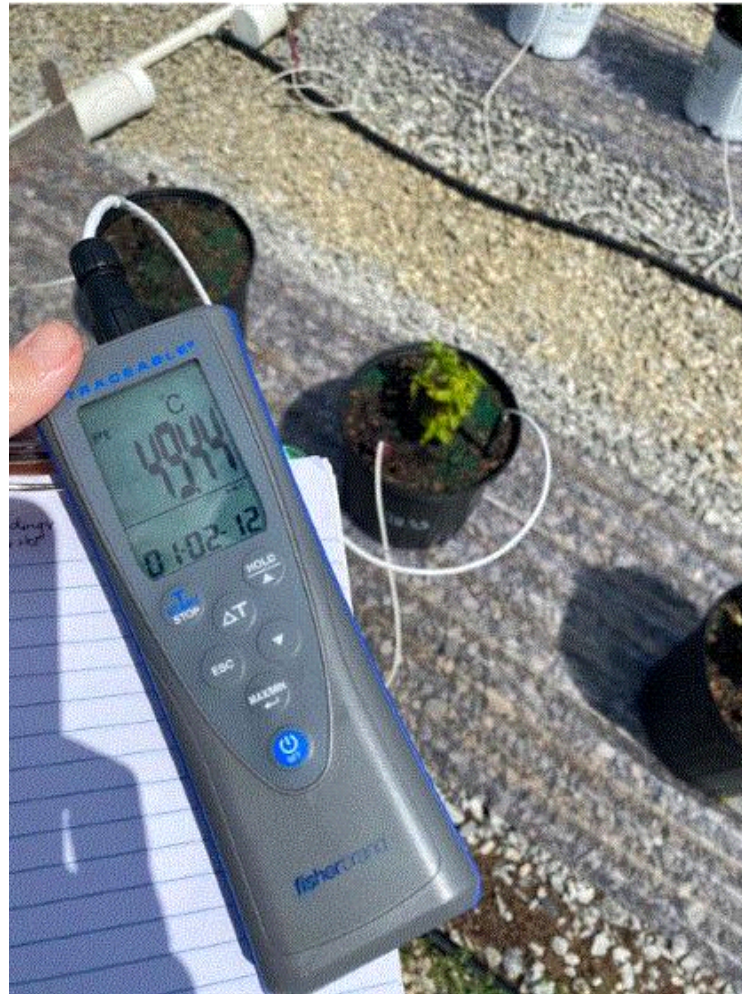
### Farwest Preview: Hot Pots!

As previously mentioned, on Wednesday, August 20, I'll take the stage at Farwest and co-present our substrate temperature research with Dr. Lloyd Nackley. In addition to the machine learning algorithms I just discussed, we're going to be talking about our several-year-long collaboration on looking at container color and irrigation to manage substrate temperature. I think by now everyone realizes it's hot—and if you don't, then I want to come visit you because it's not just down here in Florida.

Now imagine what it's like being a root ... You've evolved for millions of years underground, buffered from extreme temperatures by the nice and cozy soil. Now we pull you out of the ground, put you in a black plastic container that absorbs heat and your rooting environment is a highly porous bark substrate, which doesn't conduct (i.e., lose) heat quickly. Not a fun thought, right?

Well, that's what our container-grown plants are experiencing on an almost daily basis across the country right now. I can tell you that I abhor 100F weather (and, yes, I did just move to Florida), but that root is experiencing regular 120F, 130F and even as high as 150F at times. Not a fun experience at all.

More than that, it's not a productive experience. We can see reduced growth, lower vigor and all-around lagged productivity during the summer. However, there are alternatives.



10:30 a.m. and it can already be 120F in the container!

We've conducted several studies over recent years and everything points to improved crop productivity when you manage high temperatures. In the previous section, I mentioned using irrigation to control temperature, which is a very viable option. When the heat waves hit that's really our only option to fight back. However, if you plan ahead, there are a few options you have to mitigate the temperatures.

Shading is a great option if you can handle the cost, but on large operations that just doesn't seem feasible. Pot-in-pot systems can also help by using the soil's natural temperature buffering, but again, that takes a great deal of upfront costs and planning. The easiest way to stop high substrate temperatures must be changing container color.





Today, there are so many color options. Each can mitigate temperature.

White containers do a fantastic job at reflecting the sun's radiation and not absorbing heat. We can see 9F cooler temperatures in white containers compared to black containers. Check out what those cooler temperatures can do for the plant!



White containers yield healthier roots by mitigating extreme temperatures.

Another fun idea is directional temperature. It gets much hotter on the southern and western walls of the container than the northern and eastern walls. Take a look at what those minor differences in temperature can do to the roots. Pretty wild.



Notice the lack of roots on the southern and western exposures. The temperature difference can be almost 10F between the different sides.

Make sure you swing by our session at 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday. Look for "Hot Pots: How Container Colors Influence Root Zone Temperatures and Plant Productivity."



## Soilless Substrate Science at Farwest

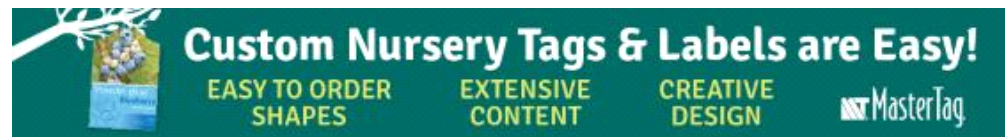
Just when you thought I was done with Farwest, I have one more session to hype. Soilless Substrate Science is a national team that's dedicated to ushering in the future of substrates to support growers and substrate industry as we navigate future challenges and changes. If you're a grower attending Farwest, we want to hear from you.

Our team has organized a listening session to get feedback that can help steer our project and ensure we meet our goals. We need input from growers in particular who are interested in learning more about new and exciting substrates or have concerns with the future of substrates. Our session will be on Thursday, August 21 from 2:00-3:30 p.m. in conference room A107/108. There will be somewhat limited seating, so make sure you show up or let us know to reserve a spot. (I'm really getting my money's worth out of my 56-hour trip to Portland.)





Anyone else who's interested in participating can fill out our online grower survey [HERE](#).



## The Landscape Show to Finish My Week

To round out the week, I get to hop on an overnight flight and hit up The Landscape Show in Orlando, Florida. This show is very near and dear to me as a Floridian and a proud supporter of our green industry.

The Landscape Show runs concurrently to Farwest next week. However, as the name implies, this show is the absolute best I've ever experienced for the landscape industry. Growers and suppliers from across the south will be in attendance to make sure you have everything you need to get your jobs done and impress your clients. Plus, there are exciting educational sessions as well, all focused on the landscape industry.

The speaker lineup is quite impressive. You can check out all the excitement [HERE](#). I'll be talking Thursday afternoon at 1:00 p.m. Eastern. Speaking of that, have you ever wondered why we use substrates and not soil in a container? What about the differences between the soils we transplant into and the substrates that we grow in? Well, you're in luck, as that's what I'll be discussing, with an in-depth exploration of the nuances between soils and substrates, and how we can use that information to our advantage.

I'm also excited to see my friend Paul Bartley at Auburn, who's leading a team exploring the benefits of electric lawn equipment. I'm a recent convert to an electric mower. As I told Paul a couple weeks ago, at first, I didn't want anyone to see me with my electric lawn mower, but as time goes on, I've grown to love my Echo mower. Plus, not having to go get more fuel or spend time flushing/cleaning the engine after the winter lull is a huge convenience. Paul's session will cover current equipment like mine, and some more futuristic and commercial options like robots—or as Paul calls them, Mowbots. His session is right after mine at 2:30 p.m. and I highly recommend you check it out.



## HRI Leadership Academy Class of 2026

The Horticultural Research Institute (HRI) and AmericanHort are proud to announce the 2026 class of the HRI Leadership Academy, a cohort of accomplished professionals from across the green industry who are poised to take the reins and advance the industry to the next level. These individuals represent a diverse group of industry sectors, career paths and geographical locations. This year's class includes 10 new inductees, where everyone was selected for their commitment to the green industry and interest in the continued success of the industry.

**Andrea Avila (Smith Gardens, Oregon)** oversees the company's largest facility, producing over half its annual volume. With a background in corporate finance and production operations, she brings global perspective and strong leadership rooted in lean practices and people development.

**Fred Higginbotham III (Millcreek Gardens, Ohio)** started as an intern and rose to a key leadership role managing growing operations. Fred is known for his steady presence, strategic thinking, and deep commitment to mentoring and workforce development.

**Tom Hughes (Hughes Nursery & Landscaping, Iowa)** is a fourth-generation owner and president of his family business. With over 25 years of experience, Tom blends operational excellence with community stewardship and a legacy mindset. He's active in civic leadership, has served on various nonprofit boards and is a former chairman of the AmericanHort board.

**Colin Jones (Manor View Farm, Maryland)** has built his career at the intersection of nursery production and landscape operations, giving him a well-rounded view of the challenges and opportunities facing green industry businesses. He focuses on improving internal systems, fostering team development and driving business growth through efficiency.

**Kaitlyn Larson (Larson's Garden Center & Landscaping, Connecticut)** leads her family's century-old business and has expanded both its retail and design/build operations. She's a champion for customer experience, team development and peer collaboration.

**Rebecca Lusk (Vaughan's Horticulture, Illinois)** brings two decades of experience in floriculture sales and strategy. She's known for her work with key retail accounts, her practical leadership style and her commitment to advancing women in the industry.

**Emily Mason (Syngenta Flowers, California)** is the Global Head of Marketing, with over 25 years of experience in product management, branding and strategy. Her international career spans roles in Europe and Latin America, with a focus on innovation and inclusive leadership.

**Hilliary Metzger (Home Nursery, Illinois)** leads a multi-state sales team for one of the Midwest's top nursery growers. She's focused on customer service, team culture and supporting the next generation through FFA and educational outreach.

**Amanda Staehely (Columbia Nursery, Oregon)** owns and operates her family business and



recently served as president of the Oregon Association of Nurseries. She brings a bold voice in advocacy, entrepreneurship and grassroots leadership.

**Leland Toering (Ball FloraPlant, Illinois)** manages national sales strategy across North America. His career includes work in retail, cut flowers and international operations, and he focuses on succession planning and strategic alignment.

The HRI Leadership Academy is a one-year advanced leadership program designed for experienced horticultural professionals. The course is built around in-person classes, which is becoming all too elusive in our modern virtual world. Moreover, peer collaboration and mentorship make up the building blocks of the program as leaders are prepared to confidently navigate business challenges, drive innovation and spark positive change.



## Proven Winners is Takin' the Show on the Road

If you're looking for a free day of education, networking and insights into upcoming plant material, I would highly recommend participating in a Proven Winners Landscape Roadshow when they come to town. Back in a former life, I was organizing one of these Roadshow events in Hammond that was derailed due to COVID and then by Hurricane Ida. We were never able to actually get a show, but luckily, there are several more each year you can attend. This fall, two PW Landscape Roadshows have been organized for folks in the Nashville and Philadelphia areas.

As they say, set yourself up for spring success at a fall Proven Winners Roadshow! These events are designed for retailers, growers, brokers, landscapers and anyone who works in the green industry. There'll be opportunities to learn about upcoming trends, brainstorm with like-minded industry pros and learn all about new plants, products and programs from Proven Winners.

This year, Proven Winners is hosting Roadshows in Nashville, Tennessee, on Wednesday, November 12, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on Wednesday, November 19. Both events include a sit-down lunch, networking opportunities, roundtable discussions, new variety information and much more. Proven Winners experts will share insights on the newest varieties, increasing sales through marketing, consumer trends, merchandising ideas and more. Plus, they're free to attend!

Space is limited and you have to register, so don't delay. You can get all your information [HERE](#).

Think big,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeb Fields". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Jeb Fields

Editor-at-Large

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