

Cracker Barrel; Benary; Terra Nova; Faire; and 200 Podcasts

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MONDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2025

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GrowerTalks' **Acres Online**

*News and Commentary from GrowerTalks Magazine*

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- Enter the CEAs!
- Auction testing reusable trays
- Where Cracker Barrel blew it
- Kerstin on branding
- Benary's new CAST home
- Color-matching with Terra Nova
- Bill's 200th podcast
- 3 BP staffers = 55 years
- Time to register for MANTS

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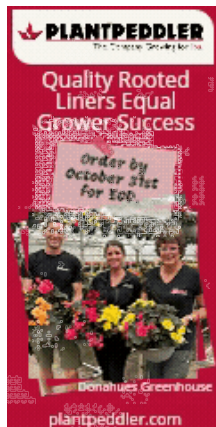


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more



Attention controlled-environment agriculture food growers: This is the last call to nominate your business for the Second Annual CEAs—Cultivating Excellence Awards 2026, in which we recognize excellence and groundbreaking achievements in the controlled-environment agriculture sector. The awards are presented by Indoor Ag-Con and *Inside Grower Magazine* (of which I am editor-in-chief!). Winners will be announced at a gala luncheon during Indoor Ag-Con 2026, February 11-12, in Las Vegas.



Last year's winners.

We will be spotlighting achievement and excellence in three categories: Operational Excellence, Good Stewardship and Product Innovation. We will select three finalists for each category, and each finalist will receive one All-Access Pass to Indoor Ag-Con 2026, where they will be able to participate in a two-day lineup of education, networking and one of the industry's largest trade shows.

Last year's winners were Little Leaf Farms (Operational Excellence), 80 Acres Farms (Good Stewardship) and CE-Line (Product Innovation).

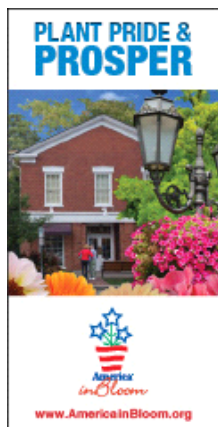
Click [HERE](#) and get your company's nomination in today!



## Auction testing Europe's reusable plant trays

I've [written](#) about the Euro Plant Tray (EPT) several times in this newsletter; it's a reusable shuttle tray designed to eliminate single-use plastics, which are becoming more and more taboo in Europe. It was launched several years ago in Germany with the knowledge that if the industry didn't reduce its single-use plastics voluntarily, governments would force it on them. And shuttle trays were a good place to start.

Now the tray has made its way to Royal FloraHolland—the big Dutch auction—which is testing the trays and the tray rental pool in its distribution and logistics system. Since March, a small



group of growers and buyers have been using the EPT trays, and Royal FloraHolland has been facilitating the collection, returns and administrative processing of them. At present, physical collection and returns is taking place at their smaller Naaldwijk hub, not at the main Aalsmeer location, allowing them to gain experience with the physical and administrative processing of the trays. The processing of trays is a bit like handling CC trolleys, they say (the plant racks everyone uses), as is the pricing model for leasing them.



They expect the bugs to be worked out of the system by the end of the year, after which they'll scale up the use of the EPT, which will help the industry meet the new EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulations (PPWR), which went into effect in February. It establishes stricter rules on recyclability, waste prevention and reuse.

I bring this up because you never know when we might start facing pressures about our packaging ... we already catch it from time to time for our plastic pots.



## Cracker Barrel cuts ties with its branding consultant

This one probably won't surprise you: Cracker Barrel has announced it is sacking the consulting firm Prophet, which it hired seven months ago to do its logo and restaurant redesigns, which Cracker Barrel would help attract new customers to boost sagging sales.

We all know how that went brand refresh went over ... like a lead balloon! Social media went crazy, fans of the restaurant revolted, the stock tumbled, even the White House got in on the fun. The new logo looked like Denny's, only less exciting. And the restaurant freshening and brightening removed most of the country store personality and turned the restaurants into something like AI might have drawn.



"Hey, here's an idea: What if we remove all the personality from the 56-year-old brand?"

Hearing the voice of the customer, the company finally relented and reverted back to the previous logo with the old fellow and the cracker barrel and the words "Old Country Store" that we'd come to know, love and trust. But sales still haven't recovered, and the company is anticipating a decline in customers of 4% to 7% in 2026 due to the controversy.

Now to editorialize: Something stands out to me. First, Prophet is based in San Francisco. Why does this matter? I wonder: Had any of the people working for the client ever driven I-95 and stopped at a Cracker Barrel for supper after a long day on the road? Or met friends or family for lunch after church or for Saturday breakfast? Or know who "Uncle Hershel" is—at least in regards to breakfast? Did they know the brand? Or just know of the brand?

Also, I knew Cracker Barrel had lost the plot when I heard the brand rollout was held in New York City—complete with line dancing. Ridiculous!

But lastly, did they not ask loyal customers their opinions before making the \$700 million leap? A simple focus group might have saved them a lot of grief. Or perhaps they did one ... in San Francisco or Manhattan. That would be like asking non-baseball fans, "Should we paint the wall at Fenway Park a fresher, brighter shade of green? Or how about teal?"

As one branding expert put it, "The debate here is not just about a missing barrel or an old-timer mascot in a logo, but rather about what happens when the soul of a brand (focused on history, community and heritage) is put at risk for the sake of modernization."

Or as my wife said (after noting the pot roast is no longer as good and the portions seem smaller, "You're a restaurant. How about you focus on the food?"



## Branding tips from Pen & Petal

My friend Kerstin Poehlmann, founder of horticultural PR and marketing firm [Pen & Petal](#), publishes an e-newsletter called *Profit Pointers* that includes some timely and trendy tips. Here's one from her latest offering that ties nicely into that last item:

**Your Brand, Your Backbone: How to Make it Unforgettable**

*Branding isn't just a fancy logo or a trendy color palette; it's the heartbeat of your business. It's the way you speak, the experience you create, and the feeling your customers get when they interact with you. Whether you're cultivating a bold, edgy presence or something warm and organic, your brand should tell a story that sticks. Because in a world full of businesses shouting for attention, the ones that stand out aren't always the loudest; they're the most authentic.*

*So, how do you make your brand unforgettable? Consistency is key.*

*Customers trust brands that show up the same way, every time. Whether it's your social media tone, the quality of your*

*products, or your in-store experience, staying consistent builds loyalty. People remember brands that feel reliable. Think of your favorite coffee shop where your order is always perfect. That's the kind of dependability your brand should deliver.*



*And don't just exist, engage! A strong online presence isn't optional anymore; it's essential.*

*Social media, email marketing, and a killer website help you stay connected with your audience and establish credibility. But beyond showing up, you need to add value. Solve problems, make life easier, and create experiences that customers actually want. When your brand consistently delivers quality, connection, and purpose, you won't just attract customers, you'll create some lifelong fans.*

I 100% percent agree, Kerstin!



## Benary reveals new CAST home

German seed breeding company **Benary**, which has been a fixture at the California Spring Trials (CAST) since the '90s and has had their own trial location in Watsonville for more than a decade, has announced a new home base for their trials display: Por La Mar Nursery in Santa Barbara.

That's because as of January 1 of this year, they've closed their Watsonville location, citing the high cost of operating a California breeding station compared to their other locations. But while they'll no longer have a home base in the Golden State, they'll remain an active CAST participant—which we appreciate! Because Benary has held some memorable events over the years. Remember their New York-style fashion show? How about the zip line? Or best of all, the helicopter ride! Then there's the memorable lunches (or dinners, depending on what time of day you visit), and the signature beverages to mark the launch of new products, like BIG Begonia Beer. We have no doubt Benary will continue that tradition at Por La Mar, a third-generation foliage and cut flower producer.

"We're excited to begin this new chapter with Por La Mar. Their commitment to excellence and their beautiful location make them the perfect partner for continuing our CAST legacy of creativity, connection and horticultural innovation," said Dwight Deppen, sales and marketing manager for North America.

Snow Maestes, the creative genius behind Benary's trial displays and festivities, is excited about the new venue.

"I get to start all over again with a blank canvas in a new location. As a creative person, it doesn't get much better than this. I love a good challenge!"

The Santa Barbara location puts them just above the Santa Barbara Polo Grounds trial stop and

just below Dümme Orange's stop at Center of Effort Winery in San Luis Obispo, so you'll have to adjust your trial tour accordingly.

Benary's Spring Trials will be March 25-28, 2026.



## Terra Nova and the Colors of the Year

It's always interesting when plant breeders sort through their varieties to select those that pair with the hot and trending paint colors. Terra Nova Nurseries has just done that to go along with three different "Color of the Year" offerings from Dutch Boy (Melodious Ivory), Valspar (Warm Eucalyptus) and Glidden (Warm Mahogany). I would think the task would be easy for them, considering the wide selection of wild-colored heuchera and other perennials. In fact, they picked 22 different varieties that go with just three colors. Such as:



Dutch Boy's **Melodious Ivory** is a neutral, creamy beige that they say conveys warmth and calm. This soft shade finds natural harmony with Terra Nova's Echinacea 'Fried Egg', whose blooms echo its gentle tones. Other companion plants from Terra Nova that reflect the inviting nature of Melodious Ivory include Acanthus Whitewater, Agastache Poquito Butter Yellow, Echinacea Cara Mia Sands, Echinacea Delightful Lace and Sedum Peach Pearls.



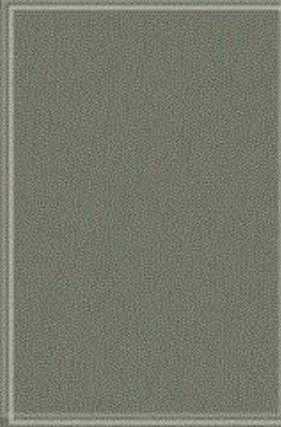
Agastache Poquito Butter Yellow



Sedum Peach Pearls

# Warm Eucalyptus (8004-28F)

Valspar



HEX #7C7F70

RGB(124, 127, 112)

colorxx.com

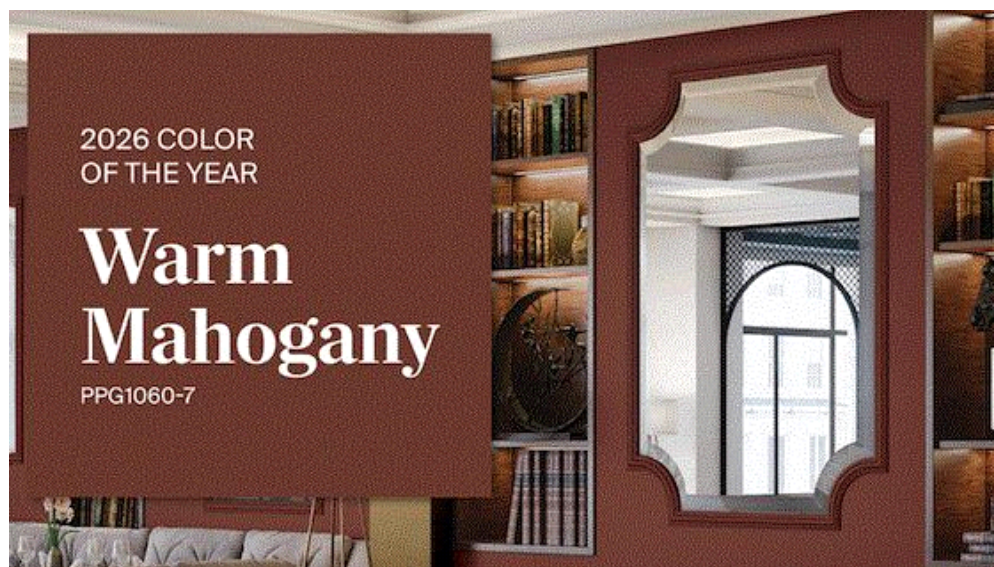
The soothing green hues and earthy undertones of **Warm Eucalyptus** from Valspar create a sense of grounding and balance, they say. Terra Nova's Brunnera Alexandria and Pulmonaria High Contrast make suitable companion plants with their serene, green foliage. Athyrium 'Pewter Lace', Heuchera 'Green Spice', Heuchera Little Cuties Shimmer, Heuchera Peppermint Spice, Pulmonaria Raspberry Frost and Pulmonaria Silver Scimitar also deliver a similar feeling of ease and enduring appeal with their colors.



Brunnera Alexandria



Pulmonaria High Contrast



**Warm Mahogany** from Glidden is a deep, burnt red that combines richness with versatility. Its warm, earthy tones are displayed in Terra Nova's Heucherella Peach Tea and Heucherella Redstone Falls, both having cascading and trailing foliage touched with similar hues. The intensity of Warm Mahogany is also reflected in Begonia T Rex Stardust, Heuchera Fire Alarm, Heuchera Northern Exposure Red, Heucherella Brass Lantern, Heucherella Gold Zebra and Heucherella Solar Eclipse, which carry the same sense of richness and vibrancy.



Heucherella Redstone Falls



Heucherella Solar Eclipse

"Plants and colors share the ability to shape the way spaces feel, and this year's selections lean toward tranquility, nostalgia and timeless appeal," said Chuck Pavlich, director of new product development at Terra Nova. "By connecting our plant varieties to the 2026 Colors of the Year, we are giving gardeners and landscapers tools to create outdoor settings that feel both personal and on trend."




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## Congrats on 200 podcasts! ...

Congratulations to my fellow editor and fellow collector of strange old objects Bill Calkins, who just recorded his [200th Tech on Demand podcast](#) (and also his 201st, 202nd and 203rd). That's a

pretty good run over the seven year's he's been doing them, especially considering that 99% of podcasts fail before they hit 20 episodes—putting Bill in the top 1% of all podcasters worldwide!

Podcast #1 was “Drama in the Garden” featuring none other than the world-famous hortisticians Dr. Marvin N. Miller. Number 200 is all about pentas, featuring Syngenta Flowers’ Dr. Jamie Gibson (I’m pleased to say I was the guest for podcast #100).



I’ll admit that we once had a staffer who for years encouraged me to start a podcast, but I never wanted to invest the time. And frankly, I didn’t think people would listen. But Bill knew otherwise, and he’s been rewarded with thousands of listeners around the world.

Check out Bill’s latest podcast, [BEGONIAS](#), featuring Syngenta Flowers’ Dr. Brian Krug and Dr. Jamie Gibson, and a [TRENDING NOW](#) featuring Felix Chassouant, the VP of Sales—Poly Greenhouses at Harnois Industries, as they discuss the company’s new TunnelPro Plus high tunnel greenhouse. Like most hip, modern podcasts, these can be listened to or watched; the above are the YouTube links.



### **... and congrats to three Ball Publishing employees!**

Ball Horticultural Company (our parent company) just held its annual Service Awards—a festive gala dinner event—and three Ball Publishing employees were celebrated for a combined 55 years of service! Bill Calkins is one of them, celebrating 20 years with the corporation—some of that with Ball Publishing, but much with Ball Seed as a retail business manager and product marketing manager. I hired Bill back in 2005 to be managing editor of *Green Profit*, and on just his second day on the job he was on a jet with me headed for 10 days of Pack Trials. It was trial by fire; he told his wife that he was either going to love me or hate me. I think it’s the former, usually.

Also celebrating 20 years is Adriana Heikkila, our Sales & Trade Show Coordinator. Adriana was my neighbor in River Ridge, so she keeps me attuned to what’s happening in my old ‘hood. She is the staff organizer—the documentation she creates for those of us who set up and tear down our Cultivate trade show booth would make an army logistics officer salute.

Last but definitely not least, Account Manager Kim Brown, who has 15 years selling advertising and sponsorships for all the Ball Publishing products. Kim is good—her first job 15 years ago was selling ME on her skills, and within 30 seconds of meeting her I *knew* I had to have her on my staff. I was so afraid she'd take another job that I sent her an email basically bribing her (with free car washes for life) to take the position. Which she did ... I think I still owe her a bunch of washes & waxes.



Adriana (left) and Kim, with their boss and my right-hand man, publisher Paul Black.



[CLICK](#) TO UNCOVER JASON SBIRAL'S PATH TO SUCCESS!  
General Manager, Plantpeddler, Cresco, IA



## It's MANTS registration time

Somewhere on the same desktop as this draft of *Acres Online*, I am crafting my monthly *GrowerTalks* column on the topic of procrastination and waste—specifically, don't waste the valuable six week period between the middle of November and New Years, which can so easily get taken up by holiday parties, poinsettia deliveries and the decision to “wait until the new year, because nobody's going to look at it until then anyway.”

And then January 7 hits, and **MANTS** opens, you realize you never registered!

So do it NOW, before you get busy or procrastinate. The 2026 Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show is slated for January 7-9 at the Baltimore (Maryland) Convention Center. It's one of our largest green industry trade shows, drawing more than 11,000 attendees to see the wares of more than 900 exhibiting companies.

“MANTS isn't just a trade show—it's where serious business gets done,” said Vanessa Finney, executive VP of MANTS. “Attendees return year after year because they find the right products, meet the right people, and make the right deals to grow their businesses.”

Early Bird registration (through December 5) is just \$20 per person. Regular and on-site registration soars 50% to \$30. Also, book your hotel now!

For more information and to register, [CLICK HERE](#).



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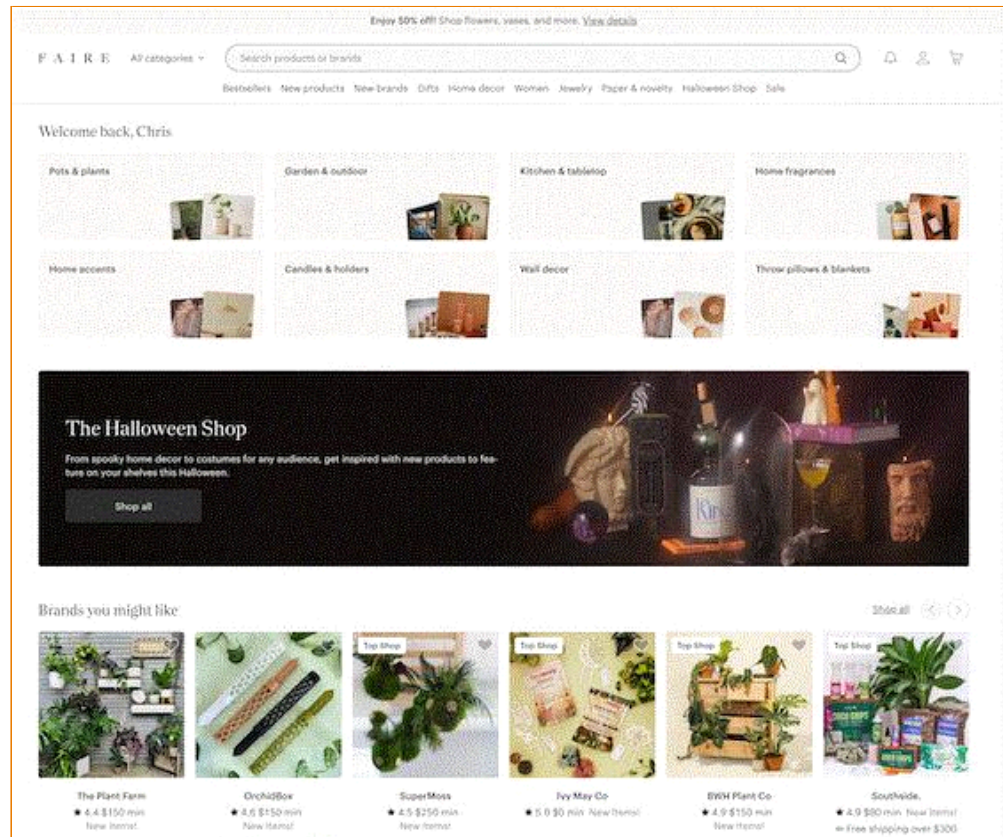
NEXUS RBL THERMOenergy PRODSPIANT

## Selling wholesale, online, via Faire

I know about Etsy, although I've never made a purchase from the website; the idea is people who create and craft things can use it to sell their wares online. I don't know if only crafty individuals use it, or if it's been hijacked by manufacturers, but anyway, **Faire** is the same idea, only it's wholesale only. You buy locally produced stuff for wholesale, in quantify. And quite a few plant growers are now using it, including one I know in Apopka.

He wasn't sure how it would work out, but after just nine weeks on the site he had shipped 1,000 orders worth \$100,000. So it's a nice little additional bit of sales.

Faire charges a commission (15%) for customers they bring to you, but if you sell to existing customers via Faire, there's no commission. Faire handles payments and offers discounted shipping (cheaper than my friend could arrange for himself). You can set a minimum purchase amount (my friend's is \$150).



Customer are supposed to provide a tax number, which is what prevents any old Joe or Jane from buying wholesale. I was able to sign up without giving a number, although Faire said I may be asked for it later. (I haven't tried placing an order to see what happens.)

Anyway, it looks like a good alternative way to reach retailers and other potential customers (like restaurants or businesses that want to offer plants as gifts, or what-have-you) who wouldn't otherwise know you exist.

All you have to do is figure out the logistics of plant packaging for online sales.

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



Finally ...



We editors have learned a lot about our industry from thumbing through the more than 1,000 back issues of *GrowerTalks* we've amassed since its debut in May 1937. One of the most interesting periods in that 88-year history is World War II, when something like 30 to 40% of America's young men went off to war, leaving women to fill the gaps in the greenhouses. George J. Ball wrote about that—pretty glowingly, too, considering the era, and his generation, and the fact that the women were probably wearing pants, too! Probably made the old gent swallow a mouthful of pipe smoke the wrong way!


But he recognized the need for women in the workforce and the fine jobs they were doing, and I'm sure he'd be proud of his granddaughter, Anna, and great granddaughter, Susannah, the third and fourth generation of Balls to run the business. Not to mention the tens of thousands of other women, from entry level through owners, who make horticulture the best industry on the planet.



Anyway, I bring up that fun tidbit to promote a documentary project called [Women's Work: The Untold Story of America's Female Farmers](#), that is set to debut on public television stations beginning October 1. I've seen the TRAILER, and it looks interesting!

Stations are encouraged to air the film on October 12 in honor of National Farmers Day, so maybe that's when you'll find it.

**Save 2%** on your 2026 lineup

Order by **October 15<sup>th</sup>** and receive our Early Order Discount on all Proven Winners® liners and branded containers, including our **2026 National Plants of the Year**.





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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