

Cloud Dancer, Axiom’s outlook, poinsettia sales tips, HortCred and my podcast!



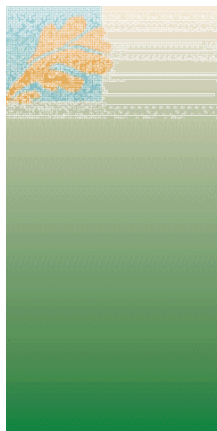
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Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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Pantone's Color of the Year Is ...

Cloud Dancer, also known to most anyone who sees it as white. Pantone is calling this particular shade of white a "symbol of calming influence in a society rediscovering the value of quiet reflection."



Pantone Color Institute's Executive Director Leatrice Eiseman said of the choice:

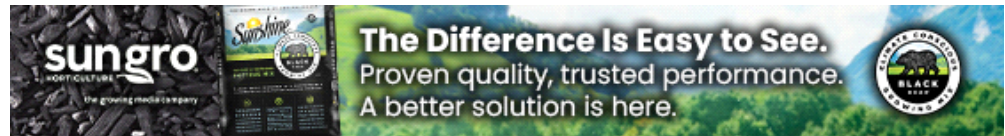
"At this time of transformation, when we are reimagining our future and our place in the world,

PANTONE 11-4201 Cloud Dancer is a discrete white hue offering a promise of clarity. The cacophony that surrounds us has become overwhelming, making it harder to hear the voices of our inner selves. A conscious statement of simplification, Cloud Dancer enhances our focus, providing release from the distraction of external influences." Read more about what went into their decision-making process [HERE](#).

The internet is doing its best job at slinging mud on Pantone's pick, however. Google the comments if you wish as I am staying away from the discord. My particular thoughts on Cloud Dancer are these: It's the same color as my bathroom wall. You know what looks great on my bathroom wall? Some beautiful tiles I picked up on a trip to Costa Rica. Also, a stained glass-framed mirror and a Picasso-esque print.

See what I'm saying? White makes your colorful flowers pop all the more beautifully. Stock up on white containers. Pop some bright red twig dogwood branches in them. Or in spring put them near your benches of multi-colored annuals. You'll sell more of both.

And if you want to match flowers to Cloud Dancer, stay tuned for next week's *buZZ!* for some suggestions. In the meantime, what are your thoughts on Cloud Dancer—other than it's a wonderful name for a horse? Drop me a line about it [HERE](#).



Axiom's Outlook for 2026

Market research firm Axiom released its annual Gardening Outlook Study this week and the take-home message is this: The time and money spent on gardening in 2025 is the highest it has been since 2022, and it looks like that trend will continue into 2026. In fact, 48% of survey respondents said they spent more time gardening this year than previously, and nearly 50% said they spent more money. That's good news for us, especially considering another finding from the study—that Home Depot declined (from 30% in 2024 to 24% in 2025) as the leading purchase outlet for garden supplies and plants.



Who is doing all this gardening and spending? The study found that Gen Y (67%) and Gen Z (64%) spent more time gardening in 2025 over the previous year compared to Gen X (33%). Those same two cohorts also said they spent more on gardening year-over-year compared to the number of Gen X respondents who said they spent more. Ditto for their expectations for time and money spent in 2026.

The study is packed with all sorts of data, and I've pulled out a few that will be of interest to you:

- 64% of respondents plan to plant more and expand their gardens in 2026.
- Specific variety of plant type (36%) remained the most important decision factor. Price (19%) and highly descriptive tags (11.6%) were the second and third most important decision factors.
- 77% are willing to pay more for the specific color of flower or variety.
- 52% are willing to drive 6-10 miles for the color or variety they want.
- 39% made 4-7 visits to IGCs during the 2025 gardening season.
- 39% spent more than 30 minutes during each IGC visit.
- 37% cited inspiration as #1 driver to increase time and money spent at IGCs.
- IGCs (22%) surpassed websites (20%) as the top information source.
- IGCs (29%) were cited as having the most knowledgeable store associates of all retailers.

Your time and attention to sharing information with customers is paying off!

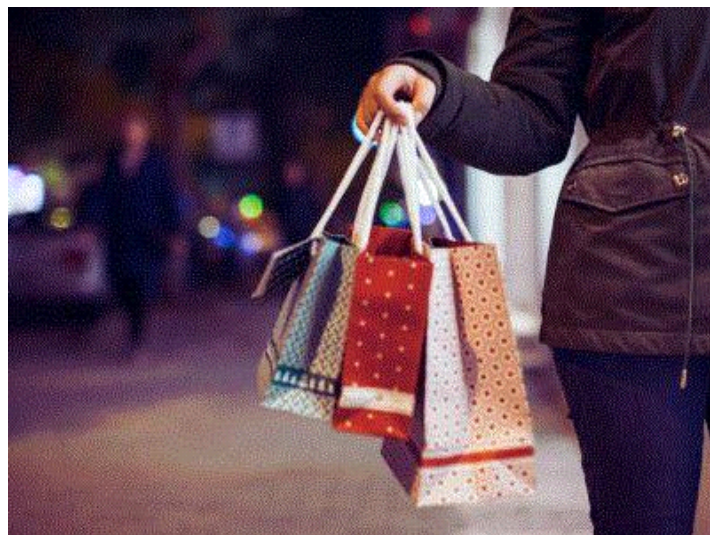
Also, note that more than half of gardeners are willing to travel for what they are looking for. That means they need to know you have it. How are you going to let them know what you have?

Again, the study is chock full of important data that you can act on when planning for 2026. You can download it [HERE](#).



Weekend Sales and the Economy

We go from Axiom to Axios for this next piece. The news organization provided a summary and thoughts about the post-Thanksgiving holiday shopping weekend. Their quick view is that it "looks a lot like the rest of the economy: fine on the surface, with potentially dangerous cracks underneath."



Retail data from Black Friday through Cyber Monday (BFCM) looks fine, they said, with sales numbers up a modest and expected amount (around 4%). But the question is what people are buying. According to retailers such as Walmart and Procter & Gamble, consumers are spending on necessities rather than discretionary items. Consumers are stretched, with one big reason being the disparity in wage growth. Placer.ai, a company that measures foot traffic at physical

stores, found that retailers promoting smaller items under \$100 had more visits this holiday season. I found this quote from the company's representative interesting: "Black Friday 2025 continued the bifurcation trend we've observed over the past several months. Affluent consumers drove visits to luxury categories, while lower- and middle-income consumers sought out deals to stretch their household budgets."

Holidays in the past have been a time when aspirational consumers sought out those special gifts that were worth a little more. Now they are heading to the sales rack. Is it really the economy or have consumers been trained to head straight to the sales racks?

Axios will be watching what happens between BFCM and NYE to see if shoppers are still shopping or are done for the season.



Poinsettia Sales Tips

I have some information from that "elevate your poinsettias" article in the January issue of *Green Profit* and I figured you may benefit from it now. Several folks I interviewed said that one of the ways they elevate poinsettias in the eyes of their customers is with some important extras.

Dress 'em up. For example, Kate Terrell from Wallace's Garden Center stressed the importance of dressing up poinsettias so they are gift-worthy, not just commodities. Use pot covers (she likes the glittery ones). Add ribbons. Turn them into a florist-quality gift. These pre-dressed (pot cover, ribbon, card and card pick) grab-and-go options increase impulse buys and increase its value.

Great customer service is sexy. The folks I spoke with at Wallace's and Mahoney's Garden Center said that addressing customer needs is key to elevating poinsettias. The staff at Wallace's will ask customers purchasing poinsettias if they would like a certain pot cover color—even offering suggestions of which colors go well with which poinsettia varieties. They'll offer cards and a card pick if it's intended as a gift, and they also include care instructions to help the customer make the most of their purchase.

At Mahoney's, great customer service is offering flexibility around custom orders. Church orders, for example, are placed weeks in advance, at which time the greenhouse staff will pull the order, customize it and keep them looking top notch until the specified delivery date. Can't get that from a big box, now can you?

All of this is in an effort to help the customers see poinsettias as a valued, giftable seasonal investment and not just disposable holiday filler.

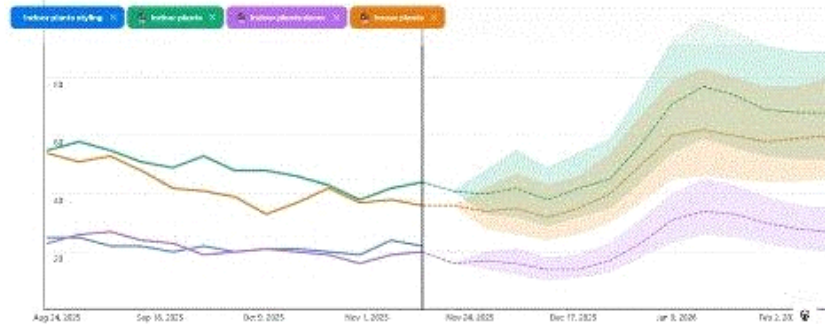
Got any poinsettia customer service tips? [Share them!](#)



Pinterest Predicts

What comes after poinsettias? Houseplants! Or is it house plants? Or indoor plants? A few

Pinterest Trends graphs sent to me by my friend Gail at National Garden Bureau revealed to me that Pinterest users (and likely your customers) are using different terms for what we categorize as houseplants. As an example, take a look at this graph which uses the Pinterest search terms “Indoor Plants Styling” (blue), “Indoor Plants” (green), “Indoor Plants Décor” (purple) and “House Plants” (orange).



As you can see with the green and orange lines, there are more searches for the term “Indoor Plants” than “House Plants.” As the lines move through the coming months—these are Pinterest’s projections for the quantity of future searches—the difference between the two search terms continues. You might want to consider this difference in your SEO and tags and such.

According to the demographic breakdown of those searches, the people making these searches are mostly women between the ages of 25-44. And some of the top pins that represent these search terms include:

Popular Pins

Browse popular Pins based on your keywords



Is there a difference? Can't say I see much of one between them.

Also notice in that graph that Pinterest's projects for these search terms peak in the second week of January. That's a quick turnaround from Christmas for you. Plan for it both in-store and in

your marketing.

By the Way ...

Speaking of National Garden Bureau, voting is now open for the organization's Green Thumb People's Choice Awards. This annual award program lets home gardeners (and you) give big green thumbs up to items in six categories: annuals, edibles, houseplants, perennials, products and shrubs. Honestly, all of the featured items are winners since they all are seen by consumers during the voting process.



Voting is open now through December 17, and winners will be announced in January. I just submitted my votes (I want that cherry). Check out the nominations and vote for yourself [HERE](#).

Speaking of Houseplants

Will I see you down in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, January 21-23 at the Tropical Plant International Expo? It's *the* place to spot the new houseplants, tropical foliage and associated products that'll stock your store in the coming year. I'll do my best to cover the show and report on it here, but there's nothing like seeing it for yourself.

The show's Opening Session is reliably phenomenal for getting the audience thinking about consumer behavior, trends and the future in general. The speaker this year will be fashion psychologist and lifestyle futurist Jill Hawkins of Copenhagen. She will open this year's show with a session titled, "Cultivating Connection by Watering Our Weirdness: Discovering What Truly Connects People & Products."

Jill's focus will be on helping the audience better understand who is buying their products. And why, too.



Why is Jill qualified to present this historically important Opening Session? Because she has 20 years of experience working with businesses like L'Oréal and LEGO to design futures that put people and creativity at the forefront of change. Through her consultancy, The Future Thief, she researches trends and human behavior to design concepts that encourage healthy and sustainable choices.

Here's a piece from Jill's bio, which may offer more insight into what Jill will present: "Blending design thinking, foresight skills and psychological science, Jill helps challenge established mindsets and lifestyle narratives that keep us stuck in unhealthy loops. She sees trends as cultural shifts to be understood, sometimes ignored, and applied only positively and with conscience."

Jill's Opening Session will take place at 9 a.m. Wednesday, January 21, 2026, at the Broward County Convention Center. Are you registered? Have a hotel room? [Do both here now.](#)

AmericanHort Launches HortCred

Believing that one should never stop learning, AmericanHort has launched HortCred, a micro-credentialing program that helps horticulture folks quickly develop and demonstrate job-specific skills. It's a flexible, competency-based learning initiative supporting individuals at every career stage. Moreover, it also helps employers build a stronger, more capable workforce.

It can be difficult to keep up with changing and evolving practices and retraining staff. HortCred helps employees and employers keep pace with targeted learning modules. "A skilled workforce is vital to the long-term health and competitiveness of the horticulture industry," said Ken Fisher, AmericanHort President and CEO, in a press release. "HortCred was developed to meet

professionals where they are—offering short, focused learning experiences that build confidence and capability while serving as a potential on-ramp to our more comprehensive certification programs.”

HortCred courses are structured around digital badges—online credentials that recognize competency developed around a specific skill. All training is online and mobile-friendly, allowing learners to progress at their own pace. Most badges can be earned in three hours or less.

The progressive learning levels are:

- CORE: Foundational skills for entry-level employees—ideal for onboarding.
- PRO: Advanced knowledge for experienced professionals and supervisors.
- LEAD: Leadership development for those managing teams, finances and operations (coming soon).

The topics currently offered are geared toward greenhouse and nursery employees. Tracks for garden retail, interior plantscape and landscape are coming soon.

HortCred serves as an on-ramp of sorts to AmericanHort certification programs, which offer longer, more in-depth training for advanced professional and technical development. Stop scrolling and make use of your free time with some education! Learn more about what HortCred can do for you [HERE](#).

I Dig Your Story

That's the name of my new podcast! I launched the pilot episode last week. As the name suggests, the focus of the podcast is on the stories of the people behind the plants, gardens and greenspaces—and it's not limited just to horticulture. If you've sold a plant, promoted a plant, advocated for a plant, designed with a plant, grown a plant, watered a plant, killed a plant, eaten a plant (you get the idea), I'm going to unearth that story and share it with the world.



I couldn't have asked for a better first interview, too. NGB and AAS's Executive Director Diane Blazek was my willing guinea pig in this endeavor, and I am extremely grateful she rolled so well with the questions—even when I revealed there would be a lightning round of questions at the end.

I'll take the next few weeks to learn a few new audio mixing skills, and then in January I'll publish new episodes on a (mostly) weekly basis. In the meantime, here's the link to the [Spotify version](#),

and you can also find it on Apple Podcasts, Amazon Music, iHeart Radio and YouTube by searching for I Dig Your Story within the app. Enjoy!

If you have any questions, comments, suggestions, etc., drop me a line if you'd like at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



Ellen Wells
Senior Editor-at-Large
Green Profit

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