

Poinsettias in Iowa, NC and Florida (where I eat one)



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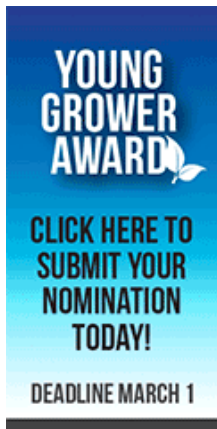
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Poinsettias (and more) in Iowa's polar tundra

I got to cover the Heimios poinsettia trial in November, so GrowerTalks editor Jen Zurko agreed to head northwest to the Plantpeddler Trial in Cresco, Iowa, a couple weeks later. Here's her report from the field:

On Wednesday, December 3, Publisher Paul Black and I huddled in a rental car to drive northwest to attend our first Plantpeddler's Poinsettia Variety Day. In case you live elsewhere, you probably don't know that the Midwest is currently under a steely, icy grip of frigid



temperatures. It was 5F when we walked into Plantpeddler, but greenhouses are the best winter respite—especially when they’re filled wall-to-wall with poinsettias.

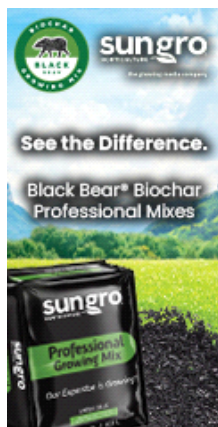


Owner Mike Gooder told me that he, his wife, Rachel, and their son, John, have been putting on an annual poinsettia trials for the past 15 years. What started as an informal meeting with a handful of sales reps has become a much larger, carefully coordinated event that sees an average of 120 to 150 attendees. This year, Mike and Sales Manager Stacy Bryant said they grew 223 cultivars sorted by color, weeks to finish and vigor.



Mike and John Gooder.

“Anything we can do to make other growers better,” said Mike. “It’s an important part of what we believe is our role in the industry and that’s the value of disseminating knowledge.”



Plantpeddler (continued)

Since Plantpeddler started their trials in 2010, Mike said he's seen dramatic changes to the poinsettia market, one of them being a shift in the popularity of red. Mike said only 40% of the poinsettias they grow for their customers is red. Where some growers, especially those who grow for big box stores, may still grow 85% to 90% red, Mike said growers who sell to more niche customers (like IGCs, florists, grocery stores, etc.) seem to have more flexibility on what they can offer in less-commoditized products like novelties, but also in other forms like combination planters—and yes, even painted poinsettias. Mike said that 50% of their poinsettias get “a paint job” and those are a premium item, complete with a \$3 upcharge.



Whites (many of which get painted) and novelties.

Mike said the more options you offer the consumer, the more their buying habits will change. It's also helped that the shifts he's been seeing haven't just been with the end consumer, but also with the genetics offered by breeders. There are now more varieties to fit every application. Gone are the days of growing one variety and forcing it for multiple pot sizes or blasting it with PGR, which adds cost. There's a color and habit for every container.

“It's really cool that some of those non-traditional types are resonating with consumers,” said Mike. Stacy agreed, adding, “You may not want a traditional red poinsettia, but you still want that holiday décor.”

Mike and his team have a positive outlook when it comes to poinsettias—a high-maintenance crop that requires a lot of resources in time, cost and effort. And holding an annual event around it adds even more. But it's all in how you look at the big picture.

“People think you can't make money on poinsettias,” said Mike. “I believe it's more of an overhead factor. If you can grow a crop and you can cover the costs of goods—which are inputs—then you're covering your annual overhead. You won't get rich growing poinsettias, but if you make your overhead in the winter, all of the profits you make in the spring will go directly to your bottom line. You can't do that if your greenhouse is empty in the winter.”



Plantpeddler Floral, Garden & Gift

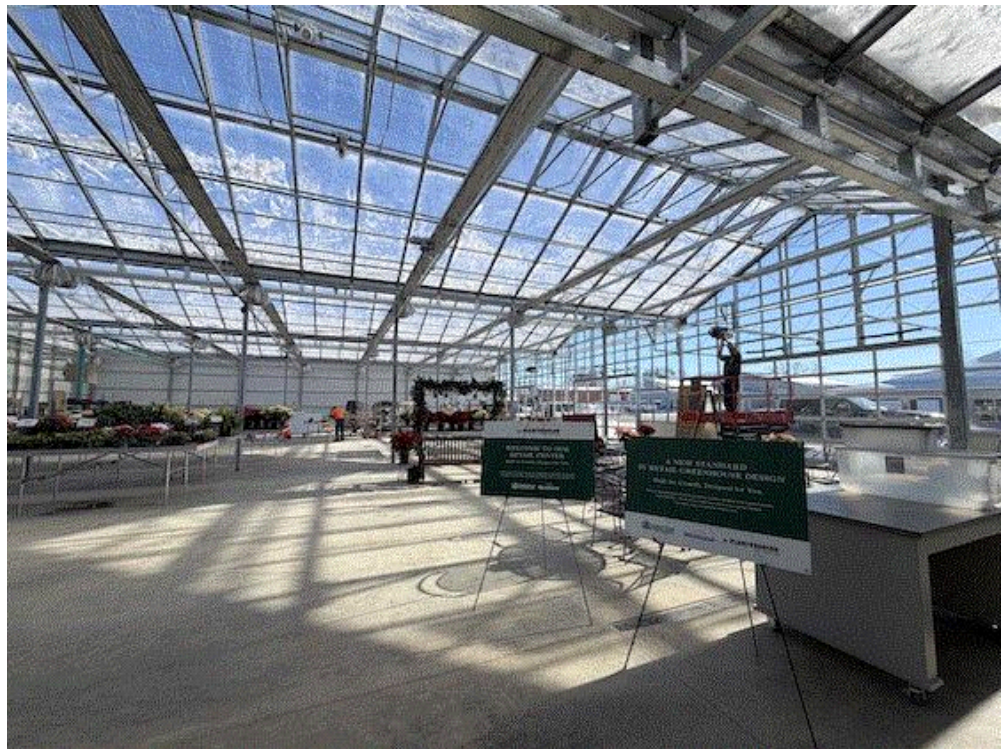
On the way out of town, Paul and I stopped by Plantpeddler's new retail location, which opened in November just down the street from their greenhouses. They were still putting some finishing touches on the greenhouse and wrapping up construction of the second floor of the main store, but they're open for business, selling Christmas décor, gifts and accessories, along with a few houseplants and cut flowers.



I spoke with Molly, John Gooder's wife and the general manager of the store, about why Plantpeddler wanted to open a retail location—or rather a NEW retail location. They've had a small store across the street for more than 45 years, but the building was outdated and they couldn't expand. Earlier this year, when Mike and John started discussing adding on to the wholesale location, Rachel put her foot down and said, "Nope—not until we move retail to a new location with a new facility!"

So, in April, they broke ground on land that the Gooders already owned that was home to a few Quonsets. Once the Varco Pruden building and Westland Greenhouse Solutions' structure was up and they were able to put out some plants and inventory, they opened for business November 22, with an official grand opening planned for January or February.

Molly said the store will be offering gifts, flowers, plants and more to be a one-stop-shop. Plantpeddler Floral, Garden & Gift will fill the need for the community to get gifts, flowers and plants for Mother's Day and Valentine's Day, but also for special occasions like weddings and funerals.



The home décor and accessories you'll find at Plantpeddler will cater to a wide demographic (from kid's toys and books to higher-end apparel) and be a place where families can come to not only buy stuff, but to hang out. Molly said they'll have a space that serves ice cream and there are plans to put in a coffee bar. She also wants to eventually hold classes and workshops, like "Mommy and Me" painting classes, to make Plantpeddler Floral, Garden & Gift a destination and a place with something else for local families to do.

Molly has lots of plans and ideas floating around in her head, which is why the Gooders asked her if she'd be willing to give up her 15-year career as a nurse to manage the retail location. They

were getting rid of the old for the new, so Mike and Rachel wanted a fresh perspective and new ideas to go with it. That's where Molly comes in. Plus, since she's now officially part of Plantpeddler and not just married-adjacent, she'll be closer to John on a daily basis to offer him support as he continues to take on more responsibility in the family business.

Molly admitted she was nervous about completely changing her career path—especially with three young children under the age of 6—but she's excited for the flexibility and opportunities it will offer her family.

"Having a destination storefront is huge for this community," said Molly. "A lot of people [around here] think Plantpeddler is only a small retail shop—they'll get to see a whole new side of the business."



Meanwhile, at Mitchell's in North Carolina

We didn't get to see the poinsettia trial at Mitchell's Nursery & Greenhouse in King, North Carolina, but that's okay because Judy Mitchell always sends out a press release with the highlights of the 11-day event (November 28-December 8), which is really just a chance for the general public to see 12,000 poinsettias in one place and to vote for their favorites among the 77 cultivars on display. In fact, Judy does a stellar job promoting the display, getting press in at least seven local publications, plus airtime on the local Fox affiliate and PBS. We should all promote so well!

Voting is in four categories: Red, White, Pink and Novelty. Plus, there's a spot on the ballot where folks can write in their favorite poinsettia overall. This year, they got 218 ballots. Here are the crowd favorites:

Top 5 Red

1. Red Ribbons



2. Christmas Mouse
3. Toro Red
4. Fortuna Red
5. Christmas Bells

Top 5 White

1. Princettia White



2. Rinehart Pure White

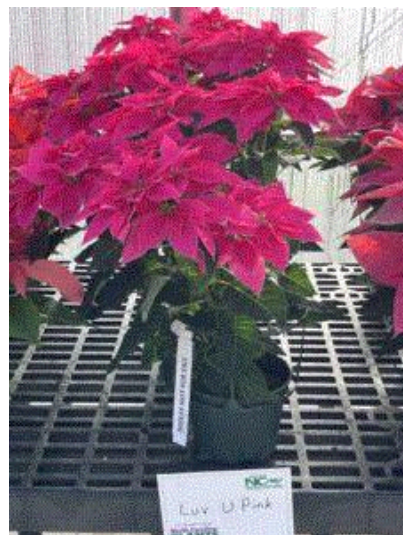
3. Alaska White

4. Moni White

5. J'Adore White Pearl

Top 5 Pink

1. Luv U Pink



2. Princettia Queen Pink
3. J'Adore Soft Pink
4. Princettia Queen Shell Pink
5. Enduring Pink

Top 5 Novelty

1. Ice Punch



2. Norwin Orange
3. Tapestry
4. Princettia Sparkling Rouge
5. Candy Cane

And—drum roll, please—the favorite of the whole trial, plus two runners-up are:

Top 3 Overall

1. ICE PUNCH!
2. Luv U Pink
3. Red Ribbons

One thing I can't help but notice is how popular the euphorbia hybrids are in the color categories. Six of the 10 top whites and pinks are hybrids. And one made the top three overall. I think it means euphorbias are being more accepted as actual poinsettias. And the fact that more breeders are introducing these "Princettia-types," as they might rightly be called, is proof of that.



Jim and Judy Mitchell with PBS host Deborah Holt, who was there to record a segment on North Carolina's Holiday Season Attractions (which will be airing this month on PBS NC, if you want to search for it).



Orban's is back in the poinsettia business!

"One of the most colorful revivals you'll ever see."

So said Fox 13 Tampa Bay's Craig Patrick in his upbeat holiday report on the comeback of Orban's Nursery in Bradenton.

Like Craig, I, too, am very happy to report that after suffering more than \$1 million in damages and crop loss from back-to-back hurricanes in the fall of 2024, and being forced to cancel their traditional Poinsettia Open House for the first time, Orban's Nursery in Bradenton, Florida, is back in the poinsettia business.



I tried to reach fourth-generation owner Tyler Orban for a quick chat, but only got the company voicemail—I suspect they were pretty busy with poinsettia shipping and didn't need me to bother them. But, thankfully, several local news outlets shared the happy news that Orban's was set to hold their Poinsettia Open House once again on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, so I got some details from them.

One asked fourth-generation owner Tyler Orban about the storm.

"We had like 4 ft. of saltwater across the whole nursery, so all the poinsettias, all the annuals that we were growing before we lost," he said. "Then, during Milton, we lost our old office. We lost the roof off our barn. All of our plastic on all of our greenhouses. It blew down a bunch of our shade houses. It has been a lot of work to get back to something, a new normal."



Orban's after Hurricane Helene. Two weeks later, Hurricane Milton took out anything that was left.

But thanks to tremendous community support and many volunteers, Orban's cleaned up, rebuilt what was destroyed and got back in the plant business. Tyler said the sales needed to get them to this point "have been amazing." It included a sold-out "Night at the Nursery" event in February.



It's good to see the young fourth-generation owner smiling!

The open house featured around 50,000 poinsettias—only about 20% of previous years, but it's a good start.

"Everyone here has put blood, sweat and tears into getting back to where we're at right now," Tyler told one reporter.



The best coverage of Orban's comeback was by Fox 13 Tampa Bay, which did an almost five-minute story on Orban's, comparing their comeback story to the classic Christmas tales "It's a Wonderful Life," "Home Alone" and "Elf." They even provided a bit of a production lesson and some poinsettia history (too bad they didn't debunk the "poinsettias are poisonous" myth while they were at it). You can watch it [HERE](#).



Register now for CAST

Soon 2025 “will all be over but the shoutin’” as my Louisiana father-in-law used to say, which means we must look forward to 2026 and the California Spring Trials, slated for March 24-27 along the central coast of California.

I've reported on some recent changes to the exhibitors and the trial locations, so don't just assume you know where you're headed (if you drive west over Hecker Pass this year, you're definitely lost!). Instead, get the full scoop at the [official Ball Publishing CAST page](#), where you'll find maps and a listing of who's where. It's also a good spot to get food and lodging ideas, and to review last year's *Acres of Buzz!* daily newsletters and link to our daily videos.



The banner features the title "California TRIALS" in a large, stylized font, with "California" in orange script and "TRIALS" in blue block letters. To the right, a vertical menu lists "HOME", "THE TRIAL STOPS", "WHERE TO EAT", and "WHERE TO STAY" in yellow boxes. Below the title, it says "SUMMER TRIALS 2026 MARCH 24 - MARCH 27". On the left, a teal vintage van is shown with four people's heads (two men and two women) inside. To the right of the van, a paragraph of text provides details about the event's date change and registration information.

HOME
THE TRIAL STOPS
WHERE TO EAT
WHERE TO STAY

California TRIALS SUMMER TRIALS 2026
MARCH 24 - MARCH 27

The dates for the California Spring Trials (March 24 – 27) have moved up a day, so the event will start on Tuesday instead of Wednesday and end on Friday instead of Saturday for 2026. The National Garden Bureau is still handling registration duties for CAST, so [GO HERE](#) for more information and to register for any or all of the stops. Please note that not all of the stops are open the entire time of the event, so pay attention when referring to the dates and times listed with the stops.

To officially register for the event, however, you need to go [HERE](#)—the official National Garden Bureau CAST page. And if you're a newbie and need help planning your trip, NGB offers two suggested itineraries for you (you can also [EMAIL me](#) for expert tips).

We've got our trip planned ... do you?



The advertisement shows a long, arched greenhouse structure filled with plants. The text "A High Tunnel for All Seasons." is prominently displayed in white over the image, with "Powerhouse®" in smaller text below it. To the right, the "Stuppy GREENHOUSE" logo is shown in green, with the tagline "Good to know." underneath.

A High Tunnel for All Seasons.
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Good to know.

Finally ...



Me, with Katy and Linda and the Bloom & Grow membership. I forgot to wear my Christmas sweater.

I've given 100 or more talks to the industry over the last 32 years, but never to a garden club.

That changed last Friday when I talked poinsettias with the Winter Garden Bloom & Grow Garden Society. It's a big group, with close to 200 members, and active, too—they put on an amazing plant sale in Winter Garden, Florida, every spring that reportedly draws 50,000 plant enthusiasts over two days. Laurie and I visited in 2024 and our minds were blown! And they do all sorts of events, fundraisers, field trips to gardens and greenhouses—they're busy!

As for Friday's December luncheon, they got a dozen poinsettia cultivars from Knox Nursery and provided some color commentary about each one as they were given away as trivia contest prizes. I also gave a brief presentation about poinsettias in general—history, Mr. Poinsett, the Ecke family, how many are bred and grown, etc.

Doing the hosting was society president Katy Moss Warner—you know her from her previous roles as President of the American Horticulture Society and Director of Horticulture and Environmental Initiatives at a little place called Walt Disney World Resort.

On a related interesting note, Bloom & Grow has four former FNGLA Presidents on its membership rolls ... and Linda Adams, recently retired COO of FNGLA, is president-elect.



And youth! I met Zoe Zakhary, Bloom & Grow's youngest member, at just 12. She discovered gardening through a butterfly garden that need maintenance. I told her I've got the best job in horticulture (I'm hoping to recruit her for *GrowerTalks* in another decade).

Lastly, as a public service, and in answer to that age-old bit of fake news, "Are poinsettias poisonous (to people or pets)?" I ate one—much to the amazement and delight of my audience.



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

See you next time!



Chris Beytes

Editor-in-Chief

GrowerTalks & Green Profit

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