

# Houseplants, Green Thumbs, AI Productivity & Meet Cheri



THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 2026

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## Green Profit's **buzz!**

Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

**COMING UP THIS WEEK:**  
Houseplant Appreciation Day - Maybe Highlight Ficus  
A Dozen Green Thumbs  
New Book Alert!  
AI for You and I  
Griffin's Midwest Operations  
An Education in Xeriscaping  
It's Young Retailer Time  
He's Got a Podcast About It  
Meet Cheri

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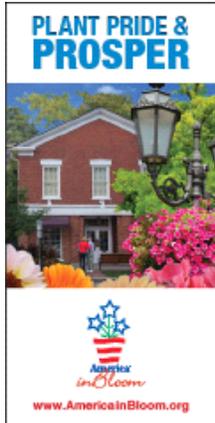


## National Houseplant Appreciation Day

If you receive my *Tropical Topics* newsletter, you'll know I mentioned that National Houseplant Day is January 10—this Saturday! Well, I have a correction: The day's actual name is National Houseplant Appreciation Day. Six of one, as they say.

However, the day is still an invitation to celebrate houseplants. While Saturday from where I sit is just three sleeps away, you still have an opportunity to get the word out to your customers and may be even some time to get a special houseplant package together.





**Specifically highlight houseplants on social channels.** Highlight one houseplant per posts on your socials with some “did you know?” facts, including a consistent message such as “Counting down to National Houseplant Appreciation Day.” Include pictures of in-store displays. Tell followers what they can expect to honor the day.

**Offer something simple but meaningful.** Make this offer available only on or before January 10. The something special might be a bonus mini plant or cutting with each purchase. Or how about a houseplant starter kit bundle of some sort?

**Focus your National Houseplant Appreciation Day message.** Address one houseplant-related issue. That could be a home’s low humidity levels or low light levels this time of year. Drive that message home to your customers with the point being, “Yes, you *can* have thriving houseplants in January and *here is how*.” You’re establishing your business as the problem solver and expert. You’re building trust. And trust builds confidence—and your bottom line.

Whatever you plan to do, you better get on it quickly! Sorry for the late notice—I’ll put a note in my calendar to write about this at the beginning of December.



## Maybe Highlight Ficus

I have to credit [National Garden Bureau](#) for giving me the heads up about National Houseplant Appreciation Day in an email sent out late last week (thank you!). In that email they reminded up that NGB officially named [2026 the Year of the Ficus](#) for its houseplant category.

This does not mean fiddle-leaf fig is NGB’s houseplant of the year. The *Ficus* genus has gads of species and varieties for all of us to celebrate. As stated in the email, “From the camouflaged leaves of the Shivereana to the resilient rubber tree, these plants are becoming the go-to for modern interior design.



Ficus Shivereana from Costa Farms

NGB gladly provided three reasons why ficus deserves to be the “it” houseplant for 2026:

- Leaves offer diverse textures and patterns
- Large leaves are powerhouses for indoor greenery and all the physical and wellness benefits that offers
- Their longevity makes them legacy plants for families

If I were you and I had a minute, I would wrap the 2026 Year of the Ficus messaging into your quick-turn National Houseplant Appreciation Day plans. Use what you have and do what you can! And if you need some help, NGB's [Year of the Ficus page](#) has plenty of information for you to use.

**THE SEASON IS HERE!**  
Get the tags & labels you need. As requested.  
**DELIVERED ON TIME.**



## A Dozen Green Thumbs

Speaking of National Garden Bureau, late last month the organization released the news of the winners of its 2026 Green Thumb Awards. As a reminder, these awards have two different tracks—the Professional’s Choice and the People’s Choice Awards. The recipients of each represent the best of the best as chosen by the people who are involved in horticultural pursuits both as a career and casually. So they cover all the bases. For the Professional’s Choice category, industry experts base their picks on the plant or product’s innovation, garden performance, appeal, durability and reliability. For the People’s Choice ... well, people like what they like.

Said NGB’s president Alicain Carlson of this year’s selections, “This year’s winners showcase a shift toward ‘purposeful gardening.’ From a disease-resistant basil to plants for celebrations, these plants aren’t just beautiful—they also solve problems for the modern gardener.”

Without further ado, the 2026 Professional’s Choice Green Thumb Award Winners include:



Annual: [Dipladenia Sun Parasol FiredUp Coral](#) from [Suntory Flowers](#)

Edible: [Basil Treviso](#) from [GardenGenetics](#) and [Seeds by Design](#)

Garden Product: [WaterPlants](#) from [Unique Gardener](#)

Houseplant: [Streptocarpus Lady Slippers Blue Vein](#) from [Green Fuse Botanicals](#)

Perennial: [Crocsmia Dark Fire](#) from [Monrovia Nursery](#)

Shrub: [Hydrangea Centennial Ruby](#) from [Monrovia Nursery](#)

Just click on the link for more information and pretty pictures. Same goes for the 2026 People's Choice Green Thumb Award Winners, which include:



Annual: [Sunflower Sunfinity Yellow-Red Bicolor](#) from [Syngenta Flowers](#)

Edible: [Tomato BadaBing!](#) From [A.P. Whaley Seeds](#)

Garden Product: [Sunshine Black Bear Potting Mix](#) from [Sun Gro Horticulture](#)

Houseplant: [Pothos Yellow Sunrise](#) from [Costa Nursery](#)

Perennial: [Festuca Glow Sticks](#) from [Concept Plants](#)

Shrub: [Azalea Encore Autumn Kiss](#) from [Plant Development Services Inc.](#)

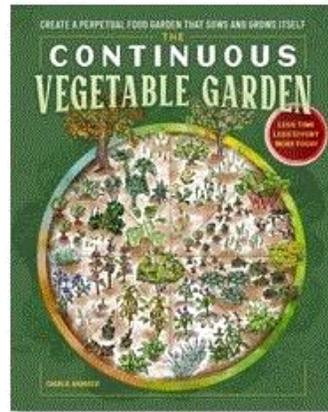
In previous years we've had some crossover between the professionals and the consumer picks. Not this year. Interesting!

NGB will be promoting this year's winners to consumers—so be ready for the demand.



## New Veggie Gardening Book Alert!

Speaking of home gardeners, nationally recognized garden writer, speaker and radio and television personality [Charlie Nardozzi](#) has a new book coming from publisher Quarto in February. "The Continuous Vegetable Gardener" helps veggie gardeners plant food crops with far less work and with more mindful/less frantic planting schedules.



Within the book's pages, home gardeners will find:

- Step-by-step guidance on choosing the right soil and site for a self-sustaining garden
- Handy lists of vegetables that reliably self-sow or return as perennials
- Profiles of long-lasting edible plants and tips for creating a perpetual fruit patch
- Practical seed-saving guides to ensure favorite crops return each season
- Simple, low-cost strategies to protect plants from frost and extend harvests
- Planting schemes and timing plans for a steady, year-round yield

If this book can also solve my groundhog and rabbit issues, it's for me! And it's likely a great book for your customers, too, as gardening becomes more of a "go with the natural flow" experience.

Get your orders in now for a February release date—just in time for folks to start thinking about the growing season ahead. The link on the image of the book above is for Amazon; for wholesale purchases, if you have a contact at Quarto, great! Otherwise, I'm pretty sure you can send an email [HERE](#).



## AI for You and I

True talk: I could not have gotten through my 2025 workload without Ellen's little helper—a.k.a. AI. I have a handful of AI tools that help me shorten the time I spend on each project, develop outlines and processes, and generally answer questions a lot faster than me sifting through Google's sponsored results.

This weekend's *Morning Brew* newsletter featured "low-lift" AI-led productivity apps that help businesses boost their productivity, saving time and effort. And wouldn't you know, I use two of them.

Now, these are for personal productivity, not necessarily for use with your inventory management, for example. Here's Morning Brew's list, with summaries of what each tool does:

- **Shortwave** automates inboxes by organizing, scheduling, writing and editing emails.
- **Willow** turns audio into text so you can dictate emails and other messages.
- **MindMap AI** creates brainstorming visualizations to help users organize thoughts and plans. This looks useful for workflows and event planning.
- **Akiflow** is an AI-powered personal assistant that manages users' calendars.
- **Summate** creates a digest of content you're interested from across the internet (I still feel like I'd be reading my summary all day).

The two on *Morning Brew's* list that I use include:

**Otter**, which you can set to record online meetings or even in-person conversations. It gives you an entire transcription plus a detailed summary and any next steps. Its AI can find mentions of anything in the conversation—such as, "Where did Jake mention red maple orders?"—and sort through the convo for what's important to you. Plus, the real value for me is that I can actually pay attention to the conversation or meeting without having to take notes. Game changer!

The popular chatbot **ChatGPT** is another one that's given me my time back. The AI chatbot you use is up to you, but having this app at-the-ready to take care of the small stuff really helps.

Your suggestions? Share what you're using to make you more productive [HERE](#).

## Griffin Upgrading Midwest Operations

Griffin Greenhouse Supplies is expanding its Midwest operations to better serve the company's retail partners. They say you can expect enhanced support, improved availability and faster delivery.

Along with the expansion, Griffin is also adding a dedicated sales team that includes industry veterans Matt Intrieri, Todd Monette, Jeff Fasel and Luke Weller. Their years of experience will pay off in better service to you—which means more business growth on your end, as well.

As part of the expansion, Griffin will upgrade its Woodridge, Illinois, warehouse. This means increased local inventory, improved fill rates and more reliable delivery especially during peak demand.

"Griffin is committed to growing alongside our retail partners," said Andrew Barry, Managing Director at Griffin. "This expansion strengthens our local presence and allows us to deliver greater value, dedicated support and seamless collaboration to every aspect of our partners' businesses."

Congrats on the expansion, Griffin!

## An Education in Xeriscaping

In my last *buZZ!* newsletter, I mentioned the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's 2026 Garden Trends. A reader wrote in with a comment about what I wrote about the gravel gardening trending. I began it, "We're talking xeriscaping here, and it's gaining in popularity ...". Holly Dickman, water conservation specialist in Hays, Kansas, wrote in to say, "PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE do not add to the misinformation and misunderstanding that already exists with the comment about 'gravel gardening...we're talking xeriscaping here'...ugh!!! This is why I don't like to use the word xeriscaping at all anymore. There is so much more to it than 'gravel and rocks.'"

"Well, okay, Holly—educate me!" is essentially how I responded to her (in retrospect, I should have written a better intro sentence for the gravel gardening trend, my bad).

Holly did in fact educate me with her reply:

*"Gravel can certainly be a part of a 'xeriscape,' but there is often a misconception that it is required or that all xeriscapes contain gravel (or worse, river rock) and then you end up with a bunch of 'rock yards' with very little green anything ... yuck! Depending on where you live in the country, and what soil type you may have, this can be even more detrimental, as rock and gravel yards can create a very harsh growing environment for landscape plants and—in many cases, as is here in Hays, Kansas—rock is often layered over top of landscape fabric, which was laid on top of often compacted heavier clay soils, creating the potential for rain to just run off versus trickle down to plant roots where we want it to go. In addition, the rock heats up during the heat of day and then holds the heat during the night, which doesn't allow plants a chance to recover (we often have the benefit of cooler nights here in western Kansas during the summer, which allows things to recover from that 100F day in July, for example). Over time, soil health declines even further with the lack of organic matter and microorganisms that often occurs beneath layers of fabric and rock—at least that is the experience here in the prairies of Kansas! Organic mulch is recommended around landscape plants here in Kansas for best success (and landscape fabric is NOT recommended)."*

Holly told me they offer a "turf conversion rebate" in Hays that encourages folks to remove cool-season turf grass and replace with drought-tolerant landscaping such as warm-season turf or mulched planting beds.

"In many of the other municipalities I follow around the country that have similar water conservation programs, they no longer allow the entire yard to be "rocked" or the use of artificial turf. I am hoping we can get to that point here, as well."

Holly provided some additional resources, such as:

- [Landscaping tips from the EPA](#)
- [A xeriscaping fact sheet](#)
- [A beginner's guide to drought-tolerant landscaping from Colorado State University](#)

Concluded Holly, "Gravel can certainly have a place in a xeriscape, but there is so much more to xeriscaping than just the mulch!"

Thanks for the education, Holly!

## It's Young Retailer Time

Do you know a hard-working garden retail professional who is 35 years old or under? Maybe it's you! You should consider nominating them (or yourself) for the next Young Retailer Award. Each year *Green Profit* takes nominations of young garden retailers who are shining examples of the best that garden retail has to offer—and they love to do it, too. The nominee that rises above all the others will be honored with our annual Young Retailer Award.



This is how it works:

- From all the nominations, Ball Publishing's editors chooses three finalists, and each finalist writes a guest editorial for the June issue of *Green Profit* based on a topic selected by our editors.
- All three finalists are invited to attend Cultivate'26 in Columbus, Ohio, in July and attend a gala dinner with editors, judges and sponsors before the awards ceremony.
- The winner is announced at the Cultivate'26 Unplugged event for young professionals.
- The winner will be featured on the cover of the September issue of *Green Profit* and is invited to be a judge for next year's award.

It's an honor to not only recognize the younger folks in the industry but also to see them grow their contributions over the years. So many of them are industry luminaries!

Feel free to nominate your best employee, a colleague, a friend/family member or even yourself. Find the nomination form for Young Retailer [HERE](#).

And of course, *GrowerTalks* has the Young Grower Award for your consideration, too. Same process, same result, with the winner being featured on the cover of the September issue of *GrowerTalks*. Find the nomination form for Young Grower [HERE](#).

Of course, no award giving is possible without the generous support of our sponsors. This year The Garden Center Group and AmericanHort continues their sponsorship of the Young Retailer Award. Ball Horticultural Company, BASF and AmericanHort are again sponsors for the Young Grower Award. The prize sponsor for this year is BASF. Thanks to all!

Oh, move fast—the deadline is March 1. Get your nominations in now!

## He's Got a Podcast About It

Speaking of the Young Grower Award, Bossman Chris Beytes has started a new video podcast, appropriately called "The Chris Beytes Podcast," on which he has been interviewing many of the Young Grower Award winners from the previous 21 years. Episode 1 is up and ready for your viewing and/or listening pleasure.



Find “The Chris Beytes Podcast” on [YouTube](#). And be sure to like and follow to keep up with what those old Young Growers are doing now!

## Meet Cheri

Speaking of podcasts, my own podcast “I Dig Your Story” has started rolling out new episodes weekly on Tuesdays. The latest is a conversation with Cheri Ruane, a landscape architect with Boston-based civil engineering firm Weston & Sampson.



Cheri’s an old friend, but quite honestly, I had no idea exactly what she did for a living. Now I know! FYI, Proven Winners, you are name-checked. Also, Cheri, on behalf of landscape architects of public parks everywhere, has requested a certain type of evergreen that does not yet exist (she thinks). Breeders, get on it!

Listen to it on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#) and [iHeart](#). And sign up in your preferred podcast so you don’t miss an episode. I have a garden/plant shop owner coming your way in a couple of weeks!

This podcast is meant for everyone, because we all some connection to plants. My hope is that every person on earth is at some point a guest on the show. As I say in my closing, “everyone has a story we can dig.” Speaking of which, I’m looking to interview someone IRL at TPIE. [Could that someone be you?](#)

If you have any questions, comments, suggestions, etc., drop me a line if you'd like at [ewells@ballpublishing.com](mailto:ewells@ballpublishing.com).



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