

Nominate a Young Grower or Retailer, AgriCurious, MANTS & More

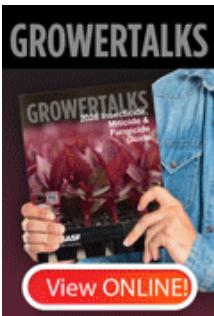


News and commentary for the nursery & landscape market

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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Nominate a Young Grower or Retailer

I'm on the AgriCurious Podcast
Kristopher Does MANTS
Connecticut Greenhouse
Growers Meeting



Nepeta 'Catwalk Queen'
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Nominate a Young Grower or Retailer Today!

I would wager that just about everyone reading this has a young member of their team that has risen above the pack and put in extra effort. Why not reward that effort with a nomination for the Young Grower or Young Retailer Award? Alternatively, maybe you're on the younger side and think you've gone above and beyond with advancing your career? If this is the case, you can also nominate yourself!

This isn't some fly-by-night award—this will be the 22nd year for the Young Grower Award and the 21st year for the Young Retailer Award. Winners regularly continue on to storied careers, with this award often springboarding their advancement in the industry. The only requirement is to be under 35 years old and be passionate about horticulture.

Three finalists for each award will be selected and each get to write an editorial for *GrowerTalks* or *Green Profit* in the June issue. This is a great introduction, as they're also invited to Cultivate'26 in July and attend a dinner with editors, judges and sponsors prior to the awards ceremony. The winners of each award will be announced at the Unplugged event for young professionals and featured on the September cover of the respective magazine. Why not nominate an up-and-coming professional that you recognize and acknowledge for their dedication and passion?

Nominations are due March 1, so you have plenty of time to prepare. You can nominate a Young Grower [HERE](#), and Young Retailer [HERE](#). Better yet, nominate both! A special thanks to Ball Horticultural Company, BASF, The Garden Center Group and AmericanHort as the sponsors of these awards.

Sun Parasol
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I'm on the AgriCurious Podcast

During my December visit to Homestead, Florida, I was invited to participate in the AgriCurious podcast. This is an interesting podcast hosted by the Lamm Lab at the University of Georgia, which is intended to explore science, stories and the people behind agriculture. This podcast brings farmers, scientists and students together to discuss all aspects of agriculture and break down complex topics into understandable concepts. Basically, this is a great way to learn from experts about a variety of topics and get a look behind the scenes at several agriculture and agricultural-related topics.

Dennis Baffour-Awuah hosted this specific podcast, where he interviewed me and Dr. James Altland of the USDA-ARS about our national substrate project. We broke down the current concerns and misconceptions surrounding substrates and peat in general, while sharing some insights on how we move forward.



You can listen to our episode [HERE](#). It will only take you about 30 minutes. Plus, feel free to browse around and check out some of the other topics while you're there. From plastics to meat and pests to food systems, you'll learn so much about the agricultural world.



Kristopher's MANTS Recap

I wasn't able to make the MANTS trade show this year, but luckily I have friends in many places. I figured that my former student Kristopher Criscione would be attending now that he's with Virginia Tech. Low and behold I was right, so I asked Kris to write me a recap for the newsletter. Needless to say, it sounds like he had a great time.

"MANTS is alive and well!"—one of the first things I heard when I arrived for the Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association board meeting held at the Baltimore Convention Center. As part of the January board meeting, we receive our annual MANTS update, and I have to say, the numbers are quite impressive. MANTS 2026 had nearly 900 exhibitors, scattered over 300,000 sq. ft., with approximately 11,000 attendees.



This was my first year attending MANTS. Initially, it felt overwhelming on how large the actual convention center was. There were 10 exhibit halls in somehow entirely different sections of the building. If it wasn't for the giant banners hanging above all of us, I would've felt like Kevin McCallister in "Home Alone." You definitely need the entire week to make it through each corridor. I've been to my fair share of trade shows, but this one felt like no other. I understood why they called it the "Masterpiece of Trade Shows." It was rich with energy and everyone was excited to be there.



I was especially impressed with the diversity of the all the exhibitors and the efforts they invest to design their booth. While it's called the "Mid-Atlantic" trade show, nurseries from all over the country—Oregon, Florida, Louisiana, Virginia, etc.—attended. Moreover, anything you can think of regarding nursery production was available to attendees: your basics from fertilizer, potting soil, irrigation and containers all the way to crop insurance and two-way radios.



For anyone who knows me, I'm big into music, specifically from the 1970s. Seeing the start to finish of MANTS, I couldn't help but think of Jackson Browne's beautiful masterpiece "The Load Out."

"Pack it up and tear it down. They're the first to come and the last to leave ...They'll set it up in another town."

After speaking with many of the exhibitors, I realized that, while this was a trade show I simply attended, this is what they do all year round. On the road, attending events like these and propelling our industry forward. I had a wonderful time at MANTS and I'm very much looking forward to attending MANTS 2027.



Connecticut Greenhouse Growers Association Meeting

I kicked off a busy travel season this week with a visit to Hartford, Connecticut. Well, actually, just outside Hartford in a small town called Cheshire. What was I doing in Connecticut you ask? I was attending the Connecticut Greenhouse Growers Association annual conference, of course!

The meeting was held in a greenhouse at Krutz Farms and was a very nice program with a bunch of great people. There were several talks on managing water quality and irrigation, managing water-born pathogens, using high-tech data analysis for greenhouse optimization, and, of course, substrate science. I had a great time visiting with new growers and learning about production that's just about as foreign as it gets from Florida.

Connecticut GREENHOUSE Growers Association

My colleague Rosa Raudales, a professor at the University of Connecticut, invited me and a few of our [Root Alliance](#) colleagues to be guest speakers and we had a blast.

For those of you who may not be familiar with the Root Alliance, we're a group of horticultural researchers who tend to focus on production inside the container—or the root zone. As a group, we work across CEA, floriculture and nurseries to develop modern solutions for production issues. We also work together with several industry members to identify the next generation of challenges and problems to tackle. It was very nice to see this Root Alliance group come together and share knowledge at regional meetings, and I hope to do much more of this in the future.



Not only was this my first time at the conference, but I also believe it was my first time in the Hartford area, and what a fun place it was! While my trip was short, there's so much history in that area. Beyond all the horticultural activities, we were lucky enough to have dinner in the historic town of Wethersfield. There are several revolutionary-era homes in this area that have been maintained and restored, and it was nice just walking down the street.

We got dinner at a nice place on Main Street that was a home built by a Revolutionary War Militia Captain in the late 1700s prior to being converted to an inn and then eventually a restaurant. Even more exciting, the house is haunted; although, none of us dared to go upstairs. I know a thing or

two about very old houses and when to leave it alone!



Had a great time at the CGGA meeting with Root Alliance members Ryan Dickson (far left; Arkansas), Nelda Hernandez (UF) and Rosa Raudales (UConn).

Think big,



Jeb Fields
Editor-at-Large
Nursery & Landscape Insider

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