

Nothing But Houseplants From Apopka & TPIE



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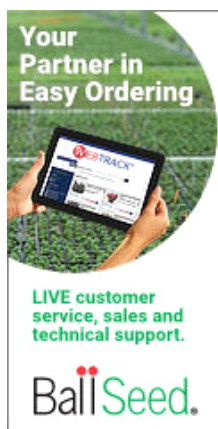
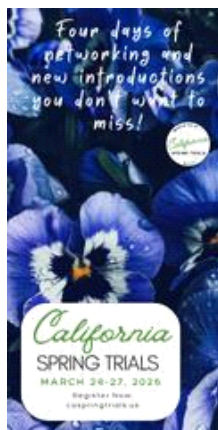
COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Visiting four growers
Buoyant energy at TPIE
Watering Our Weirdness
Surveillance capitalism
Favorite trending plants
The expert's pick
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Finally I ...



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Everything you need to know about houseplants



My first trade show of the year has been TPIE for about the last two decades ... so why break tradition now! I leave MANTS in Baltimore and Gulf States in Mobile for others to cover—Ellen Wells and I take the tropical plants beat.

Ellen, our *Green Profit* editor-at-large, as well as editor of our *Buzz!* and *Tropical Topics* newsletters, flew to Florida a couple days early. She got a rare tour of my Orlando home and barn, after which we took her to dinner at a good local Mexican/Cuban restaurant in Titusville right on the Indian River with an unobstructed view of the Kennedy Space Center. Where, conveniently, a SpaceX launch was scheduled for that evening! Ellen got to see her first live rocket launch and was suitably impressed. As was I—I've seen a hundred (I used to live on this river and could watch from my balcony) and I'm still wowed.



My main goal this week is to cover the highlights from TPIE. But, first, a few words from some Central Florida foliage growers Ellen and I visited on the Monday before the show.

By the way, if you want more show coverage, including hardgoods, check out Ellen's excellent coverage in *buZZ!* and *Tropical Topics* over the next couple of weeks.



In Apopka, where there's still plenty of foliage

On Monday, we drove to Apopka and environs, which, while not quite the Indoor Foliage Plant Capital of the World it used to be thanks to developers, still has plenty of greenhouses worth visiting. We dropped in on some assorted growers and brokers to see how the foliage business is shaping up for 2026. In a nutshell—great!

Shane Tinker of triple-threat Shane Tinker Enterprises even used that term.

"Well, for me, the outlook is great. I think we're going to be more profitable than ever this year. I put everything back into the business to make it more profitable and more diversified."

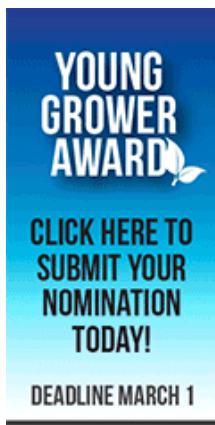
I call Shane a triple threat because he's diversified into three businesses: trucking (primarily of liners from Apopka down to South Florida); brokering of a wide range of Florida foliage to customers across the U.S. (primarily other wholesalers); and, finally, growing products they can't dependably find, such as spathiphyllum. Plus, they're adding some unique new crops, such as medinilla.



Shane with a sampling of their brokered tropicals. Shane's wife, Wendy Walker, is responsible for driving sales for the business. We met her in the booth at TPIE and found out she's a force of nature!

"[Diversification is] the key," he said. "Because, back in the day, when I wasn't diversified, June, July, August—you know, when the kids go back to school—I'd just be sitting there twiddling my thumbs wondering what I was going to do next."





Temerity Foliage Nursery

"Temerity" is defined as "excessive confidence or boldness; audacity." The founder of Temerity Foliage Nursery may have had that, but I would better describe the new owner as humbly grateful for the opportunity to own and build his own business. We stopped here because I used to buy from them back in the '80s when we were brokering a bit of foliage.



Noe and his son, Hector, who's now working full time in the business. You ever seen a happier business owner? Me, neither. The aglaonema cultivar is Wishes.

Noe Arias, a native of Guatemala, had been working for founder Les Fortin since 1998. Les passed in 2024, but before he died, he sold Noe the business and Noe took over in October 2024. Since then, he's been working to rebuild the facilities, which had been neglected for the several years Les had been ill—upgrading benches, replacing groundcloth and so on. The greenhouses may not be pretty, but the plants sure are—primarily aglaonema in a wide range of varieties, plus philodendron and pothos.

"I want to fix this up," Noe told us. "Make a good presentation and everything. And if I have more labor and business goes better, you know ..."

We suggested maybe young Hector has some friends who need a job. That idea was met with an outburst of laughter from both of them!



Two young, hip online sellers

Our last two stops were interesting in that they're both primarily online sellers catering to new plant parents seeking the odd and unusual.

Blue Moon Tropicals in Eustis was founded by Hailie Whatley and her husband, Charles Zahn, as a pop-up, selling plants at local events and markets. In 2020, after her dad was diagnosed with cancer, Hailie decided she needed to do plants “for real,” so they bought an existing 8-acre nursery and began growing the unique and unusual plants her customer base craves. Check out the categories on their website for examples: Rare and Limited, Pretty in Pink, Variegated Everything, Totally Goth, and Strings of Things, to name a few.

Blue Moon is an online business, but opens to the public Saturday, Sunday and Monday; plus they do regular open houses. (Search for their Facebook page to read Hailie’s colorful account of capturing a plant thief at one of them whom she dubbed “Miss Sticky Fingers.”)



Charles talks plants with Ellen (Hailie was off at an orchid show).

One thing that struck me about Blue Moon was the arrangement of the plants on the benches—not neat and orderly, with all like varieties together like a typical retailer might, but one of this and one of that scattered throughout. Little is grouped together. We asked Charles about it and he said it was a combination of factors: time being one—not enough of it when bringing plants back from events to get them organized—but also that if you have 50 of something in a group, the

customer won't think it's special and will ignore it. Their method offers customers more of a plant hunt.

I also appreciated that, while they have a \$750 anthurium in a 4-in. pot, they also have plenty of inexpensive (under \$10) plants to hook folks on a budget.

Lastly, we visited Gabriella Plants in Oviedo, run by third-generation nurseryman Shane Maloy, who grew up in the business, taking over in 2016 when his dad, Grant, was elected Clerk of the Court for Seminole County.

"He told me that it was now my job because he'd already planted spring crops, so it was my job to come in and look at the fax machine and make sure the whole [nursery] worked," Shane recalled with a laugh.

It had not been his plan; he'd studied business, politics and even website design. But he also got married the next year and needed a steady job.

It was in 2018 while his wife was working a late shift at Chick-fil-A that Shane began noticing plants being sold online (remember, this was before the pandemic). So, as an experiment, he made an Etsy store and posted 10 Pink Princess Philodendrons for sale. To his surprise, all 10 sold overnight. His next step was to figure out how to ship them ...



Anyway, to make a long story short, Shane bought the business in 2020, has converted the wholesale business into 98% online sales (with the last 2% going through their plant store in town), and offers more than 360 different cultivars (he's tried 1,600 in the last seven years).

As for dad's fax machine? Shane has enough computer acumen to have built his own environmental controls using off-the-shelf hardware and open-source computers. The old facilities are a marvel of modern greenhouse technology, all designed and built in-house.



Finally, at TPIE

I dislike using the same cliché words over and over again when describing the “upbeat mood” of this first big international trade show of the year. Perhaps I could use some of these suggestions from my chatbot: Spirits were plainly high, the atmosphere had a lightness to it, conversations moved with a lively clip, people leaned in, not back, and there was a bright, almost buoyant energy.

Yup, that about sums it up.



The trade show was expanded by several aisles to accommodate 470 exhibitors, including 106 who were not here last year. The 7,500 or so registrants represented 46 states and 40 countries, making this a truly international event. There was an almost buoyant energy because it's a new year and a new season, and few if any of the folks we spoke with expressed any reason to be pessimistic. We hardly heard word one about tariffs or interest rates. Indeed, they all know spring will succeed or fail based on weather, not Wall Street or Washington.



“Watering Our Weirdness”: The keynote by Jill Hawkins

Jill, a Brit, is a fashion psychologist and lifestyle futurist, which is just the sort of keynote

speaker we like to bring to TPIE (full disclosure: I'm on the TPIE planning committee). Through her consultancy, The Future Thief, she researches trends and human behavior, and she likes to challenge established mindsets and lifestyle narratives that keep us stuck in unhealthy loops. She sees trends as cultural shifts to be understood—but also sometimes to be ignored.



“Watering Our Weirdness” was Jill’s topic, which stressed getting away from doing what everyone else (or every other business) is doing and embracing the offbeat, the unusual, the unique, because that’s where people really see themselves.

Said Jill (who was weirdly resplendent in a red-and-white striped outfit), “I’m talking about weird a lot, and I like the idea of weird, but isn’t weird kind of bad? It’s not a good thing to be weird, is it? But it is because weird ... means ‘slightly offbeat, a little different from the norm.’ We spend our lives trying to abide by the social norms and to fit in and to be like everybody else, and that creates this tension inside of us because we’re often molding ourselves to belong to a group.”

Jill said getting away from norms and leaning in to the offbeat and unusual offers us a great opportunity to connect with consumers in ways that are authentic—which is what today’s consumers crave.

I learn a new term: “Surveillance capitalism”

Surveillance capitalism is a concept in economics, which denotes the widespread collection and commodification of personal data by corporations. Jill Hawkins used it when describing how businesses and brands like to “put us into little boxes,” hyper-labeling us down to the most minute characteristic, “so that an algorithm can persuade us to buy more things.”

We all know what that feels like—like we’re being spied on—and while we want to know our customers well enough to understand what they’d like to buy, we have the opportunity to learn about them by actually talking to them, human to human—a nice escape for people who are tired of computer algorithms.



Favorite plants—foliage and flowering

TPIE is first and foremost a plant show. And in the Exhibitor Showcase attendees can vote for their favorite trending foliage plant and flowering plant and TPIE presents ribbons to the top three finishers. This is as good a way as any to discover what's cool in attendees' eyes. Here they are:

Favorite Trending Foliage Plants

***Monstera deliciosa* Golden Compact (Costa Farms)**



Monstera remain trendy and a golden one is certain to sell.

Aeonium Crested Hybrid (Penang Nursery)



I've seen these offered by small nurseries (at collector's prices), but Penang has them in various colors in commercial quantities. One may have found its way into my little greenhouse ...

Nepenthes Gaya (Deroose Plants)



This hanging basket carnivorous plant has bold red pitchers that will excite collectors.

Favorite Trending Flowering Plants

Hibiscus HibisQs Flora (Costa Farms)



Bred by Graff in Denmark, the HibisQs have saturated colors on compact plants. Flora, which is new for 2026, offers giant (7-in.) flowers that last up to four days (in cool weather).

***Medinilla magnifica* Royal Intenz (Living Colors Nursery)**



As much as we love orchids and bromeliads, there's something about a medinilla that takes tropical splendor to the next level!

Confetti Orchid Garden (Silver Vase)



This big container of phalaenopsis orchids features hand-dyed flowers in blue and purple for an airbrushed effect.



The expert's pick

Pinita Alegre is the long-time manager at Rimland's Nursery and the woman who trialed Costa Farms' 12 entries in the Trending Plants showcase. So I was curious: We know which ones earned a prize, but of the 12, which is YOUR favorite?



Epipremnum giganteum Variegated, she answered after studying them all briefly, because it's a pothos, but you'd never know it, with its long, strap-like leaves. It has an upright habit, but will vine like a regular pothos, so you could even grow it up a totem.



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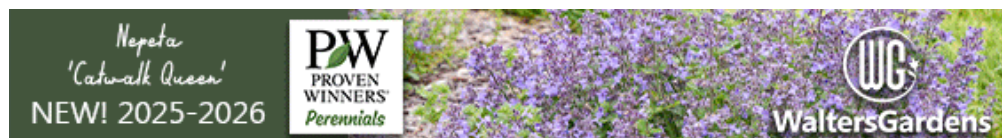
A tropicals brand for late-spring color

I finally got a chance to see Perry Wisman's tropical plants in person. You know Perry from his long stint as a partner in Dümme Orange; he's retired now, but not retired ... he's hooked up with some tropical plant varieties and hoped to build a new business under the name Lucanne (named for his son, Lucas, and daughter, Anne-Fleur).



So far, he's gathered heliconia, seed cannas and nice double-flowered hibiscus under the tagline, "Ticket to the Tropics." Perry told me he's hoping to give growers something beautiful for June and beyond, after the craziness of the main spring season has subsided.

And while he was exhibiting and does have plenty of liners to sell, he's still in idea- and information-gathering mode, working hard to craft a brand that fills a need.



Speaking of weird ...

Some of these new brands we see at TPIE have already been taking Jill Hawkins' advice about "watering your weirdness."



Dirt Bag (along with its sister potting blends Sphag Bag and Coco Bag) come from newcomer to TPIE BWH Plant Co., another one of those modern online sellers of cool plants. BWH was originally known as Bros with Hoes Plant Company ... a name I spotted on a t-shirt at TPIE 2023 and stuck in this very newsletter. This year, they won the Outstanding First-Time Exhibitor Award for their display that featured their mobile plant shop trailer. And they earned a Cool Product Award from the Garden Center Group for their mixes.

Another one that's sure to grab attention at retail is Forbidden Cereal, which claims to be "Earth's chunkiest potting mix."

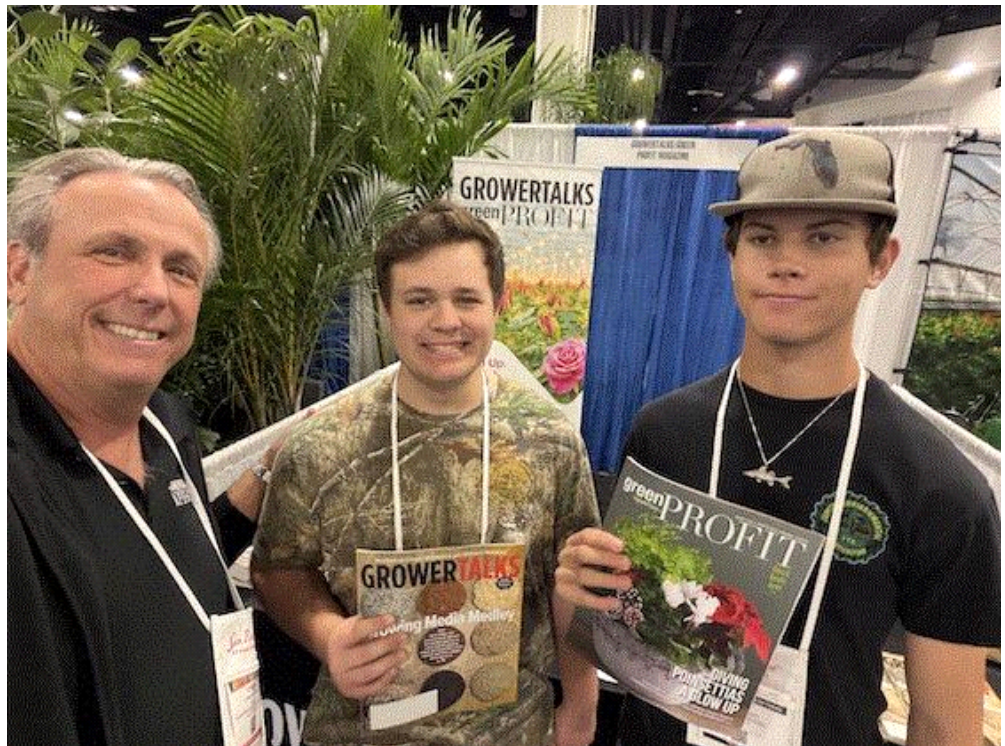


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Finally I ...



I mentioned last time that Seed Your Future had partnered with TPIE to bring in more students on the last day of the show. Well, I made a point of sticking around the *GrowerTalks*/*Green Profit* booth to greet them and briefly share what I do. It was a hoot chatting with these kids, none of whom had a clue you could make a respectable living traveling the world to write about plants and the people who grow and sell them. Hopefully, one of them is planning right now to someday take my job.



These two intelligent-looking lads are from the FFA chapter at my nourishing mother*, Jupiter High School.

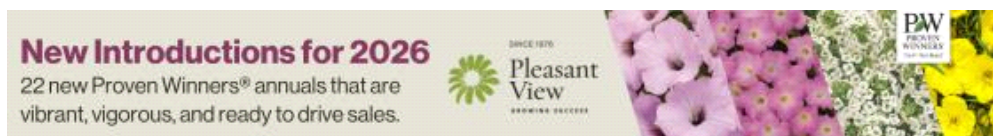
**Did you not know that's what "alma mater" means? Well, now you do!*

Finally II ...



In the “you never know who you’ll meet in a garden center” department, Ellen and I dropped into Jupiter, my childhood stomping grounds, to visit a pretty little garden center called Giverny Gardens and who should we run into but some folks from Michigan—Calvin Bordine and his dad, Albert, and daughter, Shay, all from Bordine's Nursery, obviously.

Albert lives in nearby Hobe Sound, which explained their presence. Shay is now the fourth generation Bordine in the business.



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

See you next time!

Chi

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