

An AI-powered plant platform, "Promote a Pin" and a \$22 Smoothie



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More Plant Days

Moments after we pressed send on last week's *buzz!* newsletter I received an email from National Garden Bureau's Executive Director Diane Blazek. I had one of those "gosh, of course I knew that!" moments when she reminded me that NGB has had a "National Day of" calendar on their website for years. Of course they have!

NGB's "National Day of" page is specific for garden and plant-related holidays. You can find it [HERE](#).





In addition to the “National Day of” days I mentioned last week, NGB lists the following for the rest of the month of April:

- April 17 – National Bat Appreciation Day
- April 17 – Herbalist Day “Thank an Herbalist Day”
- April 19 – National Garlic Day
- April 20 – National Lima Bean Respect Day (*Editor’s note: In no way will I be participating in this day*)
- April 22 – Earth Day
- April 23 – Picnic Day
- April 26 – International Seeds Day and National Audubon Day
- April 29 – National Peace Rose Day

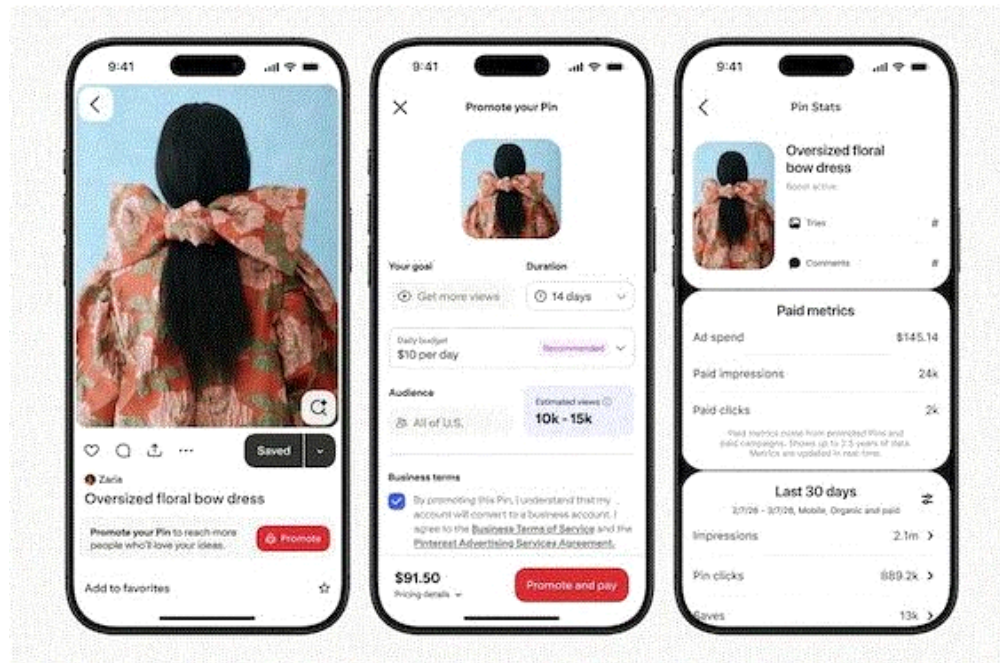
NGB’s site also lists the holidays by month for the entire year. Get planning!

For a general list of “National Day of” holidays, I lean on [National Day Calendar](#). Looking ahead, I see that May 3rd is National Garden Meditation Day, as well as National Lumpy Rug Day. There are lots of days out there you can have fun with—like National Blueberry Popsicle Day (September 2) and National Paper Bag Day (July 12). Put those thinking caps on and create an event!



Promote a Pin

The folks at NGB often send along Pinterest-related trends, so when this news about Pinterest popped into my inbox it caught my attention. The social platform recently [launched a “Promote a Pin”](#) feature for small business users. This feature is designed to allow you to boost your own existing pins to connect with relevant audiences with just a few taps, no need for prior advertising experience.



“From entrepreneurs to global brands, we’re making it easier for businesses of every size to reach the right audiences, connect with new customers and grow on Pinterest,” said Lee Brown, Pinterest’s Chief Business Officer. “Promote a Pin is a significant step in our work to remove barriers and deliver simple, powerful tools that unlock greater opportunity and long-term growth.”

As National Garden Bureau has been driving home to us for a couple of years now, Pinterest is a platform with engaged users. They note that 80% of businesses on Pinterest report higher customer interest and engagement than on other platforms.

What I appreciate about the Promote a Pin feature is that you can boost already-existing posts that have already seen some organic traction, rather than creating something from scratch. I’m a firm believer in not having to reinvent the wheel when it already exists.



A New Plant Platform Powered by AI

Colleague Jen Polanz recently chatted with someone hoping to help you solve your plant photo and description issues using the power of AI. Here’s what she gathered from her conversation.

As we’re all taking a closer look at AI and how it can streamline processes and make us more efficient, I’m always open to talking with people who are actively working with the technology for these purposes. That’s how I got to talking with Edwin Meijer.

Edwin, based in the Netherlands, is the co-creator of [OpenPlantData.com](https://www.openplantdata.com), where he and two other owners offer a platform for plant photos and descriptions using AI. These images, created using AI, are cultivar specific with descriptions that are automatically adjusted based on hardiness zone. And lest you think of neon-blue hostas or other misleading images consumers see all the time on the web, they have worked hard to create accurate representations of cultivars.

I questioned the use of AI-generated images, and he said his company worked with a team of

legal experts at Stanford University to make sure it adhered to U.S. law. The platform solves the issue of finding appropriate plant images for growers and retailers who want to put plants online or print bench cards for signage, and he said it is being used by retailers, wholesale growers and even breeders looking for the right images. "Both customers and store members are lacking plant knowledge nowadays," Edwin said. "Proper photos and information on your site, shop and bench cards helps a lot. It's your silent sales force."





Examples of *Dieffenbachia seguine* Reeva created with AI showing different pots and background settings.

For the descriptions, there are multiple fields with some differing based on zone, so something that reads as an annual up north can change to a perennial in the south, for example. The photos can have different styles, too, showing a variety of home types or indoor versus outdoor.

The technology is being used in multiple European growers and garden centers, and he's working with a Texas-based garden center to go live soon.

"It can be a really powerful tool, but it's not a magic tool," he said, noting the goal is to solve problems facing growers and retailers in pulling together images and descriptions. "I've been working with independents for 25 years, and they all have more or less the same challenges. We want to help them."

Thanks for this, JP!



Best Urban Gardening Cities

With approximately 80% of the U.S. population living in or near urban centers (according to Census.gov), let's take a look at the best cities in which to garden. The folks at LawnStarter ranked the best cities for urban gardening.

1. Atlanta, Georgia
2. Miami, Florida
3. Houston, Texas
4. St. Louis, Missouri
5. Jacksonville, Florida
6. Orlando, Florida
7. Cincinnati, Ohio
8. Fort Myers, Florida
9. Tampa, Florida
10. Austin Texas

How did LawnStarter conduct their ranking? They considered access to community gardens per 10,000 residents, as well as the number of food forests and the average size of yards. Of course, the climate goes a long way in making gardening possible in a city (notice all the southern cities), as does access to gardening supplies.



I have had several urban community garden plots over the last 25 years, and these are truly oases in a sea of pavement and brick. And for some neighborhoods, these plots provide a good supply of fresh vegetables in a food desert. With grocery prices steadily rising, lending a hand in promoting urban food gardening can result in better access to fresh food.

Back to the ranking. The folks at LawnStarter didn't stop at just 10 cities. They've stacked up the 500 most populated U.S. cities. Where does your closest urban area rank? Find it [HERE](#). I'm at 137. There is a lot of good information on that page if you dig down into it. Be sure to dive into the reasons why these top 10 cities ranked as they did and the resources they offer.

The \$22 Smoothie

I ran across an article last week that shines a light on why Americans are both anxious about the economy but also willing to splurge on something like a \$22 smoothie or \$10 tins of sardines. Similar to the Lipstick Index of the early 2000s, these splurges are not contradictions but are "two expressions of the same psychological reaction," says an article on the topic in [The Conversation](#) written by a professor of consumer behavior and marketing.



“When people feel life is out of control, they reach for something small, expensive and signaling virtue,” the professor explained. This behavior has a name, “compensatory consumption,” and it entails buying things to feel in control. Lipstick was the go-to splurge after the September 11th attacks, and it now appears that expensive food items are the new indulgence.

Why food and not lipstick this go-around? The article’s authors said there are several reasons: Food is experiential, emotional and visible. “Premium food isn’t just eaten,” they wrote, “it’s filmed, posted and performed.”

It’s not just any food either. It’s food with “virtue:” Sustainably sourced tinned fish; the flax seeds and high-grade sea moss gel in the smoothies; the single estate-sourced olive oil. This adds another layer of meaning to these purchases that are then set out on social media.

While my grocery cart is usually filled with the likes of overripe bananas and squishy eggplants sourced from the day-old produce rack in Market Basket, it’s important for me to be reminded that a slice of our society does still have the money and agency to splurge on virtuous indulgences. Go ahead and create those \$500 combo containers or carry that rare houseplant. Unlike that raw, animal-based smoothie, your offerings have a longer shelf life.

Speaking of Food

The folks at Food Navigator [released their picks for the food trends](#) that are overtaking the UK. Of the five trends they listed, I found these two could most easily be applicable to U.S. garden market.

Nostalgia: With the European economy also in a rough patch, consumer analytics company Mintel’s research found that 62% of food and drink buyers are opting for products that remind them of what they would eat and drink as children. This looking to the past is like a stabilizing and comforting force.



Newness: Counter to nostalgia is newness. Some folks don't want to be stuck in the past and prefer something new and different. They found that about 70% of people want food and drink that provide new experiences, such as "mystery" flavors or flavor combinations they have not seen before.

How does this show up in garden retail? Old stalwarts such as the classic geranium and dracaena combos, and maybe those new glow-in-the-dark Firefly petunias. You catch my drift. The idea is to offer both—nostalgia and new—to satisfy both consumers.

Southern Garden Tour

If you are the kind of hort person who can't get enough of trial gardens, you can get your fill during the 2026 Southern Garden Tour, happening June 2-4. Held at three prestigious hort institutions across three states, you'll have the opportunity to view and evaluate hundreds of new plant introductions.



Metrolina's Trial Gardens

Your trial garden hosts for the Southern Garden Tour are:

- Young's Plant Farm in Auburn, Alabama
- University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia
- Metrolina Greenhouses in Huntersville, North Carolina

The Southern Garden Tour begins with an industry open house at Young's Plant Farm on Tuesday, June 2. The University of Georgia Trial Gardens will host an industry open house the morning of Wednesday, June 3. On the final day of the tour, Metrolina Greenhouses will host its

industry open house on June 4. Can't make it on those specific dates? You are encouraged to visit each of the three trial gardens throughout the summer.

For whom is this Southern Garden Tour intended? Well, anyone directly involved in the horticulture industry—growers, plant breeders, plant brokers, educators, landscapers and allied trade members. As you are aware, the trial garden system that pits similar varieties against each other under real-world gardening conditions helps decision-makers decide which of the new plant introductions will work best for their customers.

[Register for each stop of the Southern Garden Tour at the event's website.](#) The collaborative website provides information on all three trial garden sites, along with travel resources and event details.

While You're in Illinois ...

Last week I informed you about the [Darwin Perennials Day](#) at Ball HQ in West Chicago, Illinois, on Wednesday, June 17. If you're not planning on hightailing it out of state, you may also want to plan on attending Midwest Groundcovers' Pollination Celebration on June 18 in St. Charles. Held at Midwest Natural Garden, the event is a discovery of the beauty and benefits of native landscapes.



Featured speakers include Jens Jensen who will search out and discuss wetland species around the property's bioswale; Bill DeBoer or Woody Warehouse Nursery sharing insights on native shrubs; and Enrique Rodriguez who will lead tours of Midwest's stock beds.

Your registration includes the tours, walks, lunch and plant giveaways. Proceeds from the

registration fee (just \$15, less than a fancy smoothie!) benefit Homegrown National Park and The Conservation Foundation.

Register for the event [HERE](#).

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



Ellen Wells
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