

Webinars, an Online Course for Substrates & More



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FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2026

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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

UF Online Substrates
tHRive Webinars
Irrigation with Gerry Spinelli
Virginia Beach Nursery
Workshop
Thinking About New Plants



The **BIGGEST** and **GREENEST**
industry trade show in the West.

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AUGUST 26-28

Online Substrates Course from UF

Last newsletter I mentioned the upcoming University of Florida Greenhouse Training Online courses for Greenhouse & Nursery Management that I am helping with this year. Now I want to share another UF Greenhouse Training Online course we are releasing in a couple weeks.

On June 1, the Substrates for Container-Grown Plants course officially starts. This is the second year that Dr. Loren Oki and I are teaching this course, which provides all the basics you need to be a substrate scientist. Whether you work with nursery or greenhouse plants, or really any containerized plant system, this course can help build your knowledge and strengthen your skills surrounding substrates or growing media. It is great for a refresher or as a place to help build your staff and invest in their professional development.

I had a blast teaching our first session last fall and am excited to jump into our next. This is part of the Root Zone Expert Certificate Program offered by UF Greenhouse Training Online. Its funny how we can fit just about everything I know about substrates into eight short learning modules spread over four weeks. With an average of 5 hours a week commitment, this is much better than sitting in a classroom for an entire semester, trust me.



The course runs from June 1 to June 26, and you can go at your own pace. The cost is \$293, but you get a 20% discount if you register five or more people from your team. Check out the course and register [HERE](#). While you're there, take a look at all the other courses offered. This is truly a great opportunity to support your team and operation—and maybe impress your friends with all your new substrate knowledge!



tHRive Webinars

It's been a very busy week for me developing all this educational content, but I love it. Earlier this week I presented an update on our Soilless Substrate Science project and discussed my vision for the future of substrates on a tHRive webinar. It was a great time, and I was somehow able to fit over 100 minutes of content in under an hour. I honestly might have a problem. Either way, it was great and I truly appreciate the invitation to participate.

If you were not able to join, you can check it out on the [tHRive website](#). While you're there, scroll on down to check out the extensive tHRive webinar library. There is so much free information there, it is really an amazing resource by the Horticulture Research Institute. Also, be sure to check out the upcoming webinars. Dr. Ariana Torres is going to present on using The HortCalculator. I'll be honest, I had no idea what that was, but it looks like it's a decision-making tool that helps growers with financial decisions. Seems exciting. We'll have to join the webinar on June 4 to find out more.

Irrigation Strategies with Dr. Gerry Spinelli

How much online education can I fit into a single newsletter? I'll tell you when I find out.

Irrigation is one of my second favorite topics, and there is no one more exciting to learn about irrigation with than Dr. Gerry Spinelli. On May 26, Gerry will join the American Floral Endowment's Grow Pro webinar series to talk about Smart Water Use and Practical Irrigation Strategies. Gerry is going to share insights into how making practical water decisions can influence just about everything. Not just that, but he is going to tell us how to adjust our irrigation and provide clear strategies to improve consistency, reduce waste and support healthier crops. As always, it's free to join. You can register for this webinar [HERE](#).



Dr. Spinelli always brings joy with irrigation jokes!

Next Week—Virginia Beach Nursery Workshop

If you're a grower in the Mid-Atlantic region, you might want to head to Virginia Beach next Wednesday for a full day of grower education from some of the greatest nursery production minds in the country, and I'll be there, too! Virginia Tech is hosting the Mid-Atlantic Nursery Water Workshop, and if you're an avid reader of this newsletter, this might sound familiar. Because it's such a great opportunity, I wanted to give it one last reminder to come see me at the beach!

The day is going to follow water's journey through the nursery starting from the pond and finishing... back in the pond. Check out the lineup:

- Dr. Sarah White (Clemson)—Pond water quality: work with not against, chemistry
- Dr. Jeb Fields (UF)—Engineering soilless substrates for water efficiency
- Dr. Jim Owen (Profile)—Maintaining effective rotozone fertility in container nurseries
- Dr. Kris Criscione (VT)—Optimizing irrigation scheduling and delivery to reduce runoff
- Dr. Jake Shreckhise (USDA)—Escaping the black cauldron: Light-colored containers and other strategies for cooler, healthier roots

Then head outside for some demonstrations from:

- Dr. Alejandro De-Pozo (VT)—The use of drones in Entomology
- Dr. Amy Fulcher (UT)—First Things First: Assessing irrigation application uniformity as a foundation to refining irrigation
- Dr. Ping Yu (UGA)—Irrigation and sensors
- Justin Leavitt (Moleaer)—Pondwater Management

It only costs \$35 to attend and you get lunch. There are few opportunities to get access to all these researchers and ask any questions you want. Check out the flyer below and register [HERE](#).

Mid-Atlantic Nursery Workshop

The Water Loop from Pond to Pot:
Managing Ponds, Irrigation, Substrates,
and Runoff for Better Production Profits

MAY 20, 2026
9 AM - 3 PM

Location: -----

VT VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
HAMPTON HEADS AGRICULTURAL
RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER
VIRGINIA TECH

1444 Diamond Springs Road - Virginia Beach, VA - 23455

Presentation Topics: -----

Pondwater quality and management regarding:

- Chemical parameters
- Biological parameters
- Soilless substrate engineering
- Irrigation scheduling and delivery
- Root zone temperature management
- Drone technology and nursery application
- Irrigation efficiency - distribution uniformity and leaching fraction
- Fertility management and pour-throughs
- Measuring substrate porosity

Please Register!

\$35 / Person

<https://vnla.wildapricot.org/event-6509502>

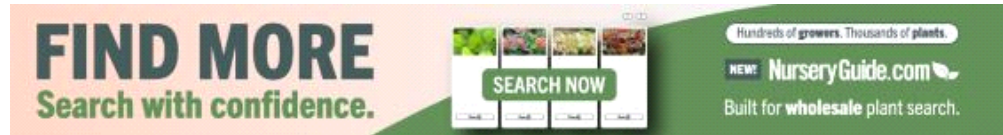
Questions? Please contact:
Dr. Kristopher Criscione
kscricione@vt.edu
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*We have applied for Pesticide Credits
*This workshop is offered in partnership with research and extension scientists of the multistate research project, "NC-1186 Water Management and Quality for Ornamental Crop Production and Health"

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Always Thinking About New Plants

It's getting to be that time again. I am beginning to reach out to anyone that might work for, with, or nearby people who are helping bring new plants to the market. Each year I get to compile a list of all the new shrubs set to hit the market next spring and publish my favorites in the August issue of *GrowerTalks Magazine*. If you have plants ready for release and want to send me some information and photos, I would love to learn more. So why not send all the amazing new plants my way—I mean photos of course, I would never solicit new exciting plants for the landscape!

More than that, I am also interested in your perspectives. Last year, I was able to talk with several breeders and decision-makers in the plant branding world and get their insight on how new plants are brought to market and what direction the breeding programs are going. I also included insights from consumers to show what traits get us most excited. You can check out that article [HERE](#).

The opinions and input I received last year were incredibly helpful, and I would still love to hear from anyone with ideas regarding new plant introductions. Is there anything in particular you want to see more? Traits, forms, taxa, ecosystem services—what trends get you excited? Last year I heard a lot of discussion of pollinators and perceptions of environmental stewardship in plants, all while being more compact and colorful. How about things you might be getting tired of seeing? I can certainly think of a few things that are starting to become stale to me, I'll bet you can, too.

Personally, I have become very interested in the great debate that seems to be surrounding invasive plants. Might that be a label that is tossed around too readily, or maybe not strictly enough? How about the idea of native plants or plants that can help support the environment? Dare I say, the rising zealotism surrounding natives seems to be growing—at least from my perspective. This is a concept I hope to explore deeper and would love any insight or input you might have, whether you're a world class breeder or just a fan of plants like me. [Drop me a line](#), I would love to hear from you.

Think big,



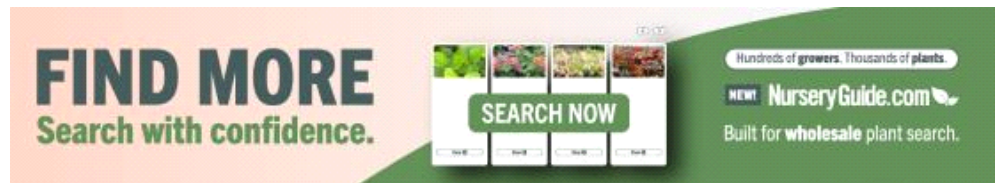
Jeb Fields

Editor-at-Large

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