

BFG News; 80 Acres is Out; Ball Gets Tradewinds; EHR Gets leafjoy



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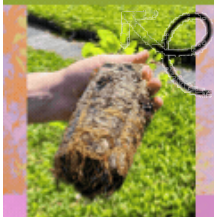
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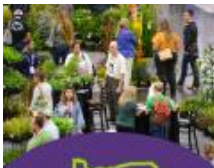
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GrowerTalks' Acres Online

News and Commentary from GrowerTalks Magazine

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

BFG: What we know
Another vertical goes horizontal
Are CEA growers benefiting?
Ball takes over Tradewinds
At Ball Customer Days
- August 5, 1953
Stemmer features silicon
EHR to distribute leafjoy
A controversial planting method



BFG Supply: What We Know Thus Far

From one of our experienced newspaper reporters, Jen Polanz:

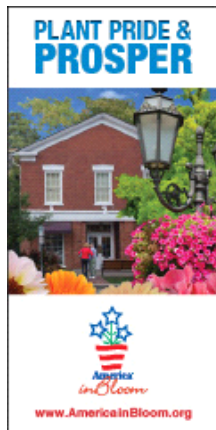
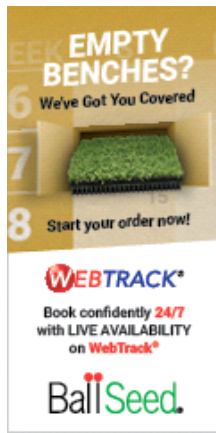
Last week we began getting texts and emails from members of the industry about BFG Supply—one of the largest distributors in our industry—potentially ceasing operations sometime in the future. We have not confirmed this with the company and we've reached out to BFG for comment, but have not received a response. We've seen at least two emails detailing some of what was told to employees there during a company meeting last Tuesday, including that the company was unable to secure the financing needed to continue operations.

We've seen conflicting reports about what that means for upcoming events like the two BFG Expos in Cleveland, Ohio, and Reno, Nevada, so verify before booking anything.

Layoffs were expected to occur on a rolling basis. The company employed more than 650 people full time, along with more than 150 sales reps.

Based on the information we've seen, product is expected to continue shipping out of warehouses in the coming weeks, but nothing else will come in at this point. The news seemed to come as a shock to many in the industry, including retailer and grower customers who posted on an industry Facebook group who had not yet heard the news.

BFG Supply, originally founded in Burton, Ohio, has been around for more than 50 years, growing its distribution business to include 13 warehouses shipping to all 50 states and regions of



Canada, offering more than 100,000 products for order and stocking more than 30,000 products in warehouses. It also had its own family of brands, including Michael Carr Designs, Gardener Select, Grower Select and DeCloet Greenhouse.

The company first began working with a private equity firm in 2000 and was acquired by a different private equity firm in 2010. BFG expanded over the years to purchase other distributors like Wetsel (2011) and L&L Nursery Supply (2021), among others.

We're continuing to follow this developing situation and if you'd like to reach out to me, click [HERE](#).



Another vertical farm goes horizontal

This time it's 80 Acres Farms, which has been one of the darlings of those who believe vertical farming (you know, indoors, on racks, under LED lights, no bugs, healthier, tastier, etc.) is the future of farming.

Alas, they had 10 years and nearly \$400 million of investment capital to spend, and yet they've shut down all operations as of August 3, due to the inability to "secure the capital required," according to cofounder and CEO Mike Zelkind on the company's LinkedIn page.

The statement continued:

"After an exhaustive effort to find a way forward, 80 Acres Farms is winding down operations.

"For a decade, our team has proven that vertical farming can work at scale—building and



operating indoor farms that ultimately supplied more than 18,000 retail locations across the US. We're proud of our work, the problems we solved and the fresh, clean produce that fed so many people."



Admittedly, 80 Acres has been on a spending spree of late, acquiring three vertical farms from the bankrupt Kalera Inc. in 2025 and later that year merging with Soli Organic. That rapid growth probably strained their resources.

The news is a bit surprising, given that 80 Acres has been viewed as one of the sectors most technically competent operators. In fact, we awarded them our first Good Stewardship Award at the Inaugural CEAs—Cultivating Excellence Awards at Indoor Ag-Con in 2025. They did do “an exemplary job meeting and exceeding the sustainability expectations of today’s customers, producing more with less ...” but when it comes to “doing it profitably while giving back to their workforce and communities” ... well, we didn’t ask them to open their books, unfortunately. So if 80 Acres can’t make it pay, what does that say about those still afloat?



80 Acres (continued)

And there are a few left:

- AeroFarms in Virginia, which specializes in microgreens (which get sprinkled on food; they are NOT food), declared Chapter 11 in 2023 and almost shut down again in 2025, but was resurrected by a new venture capital owner
- Oishii in New Jersey, which is uniquely focused on ultra-premium strawberries and tomatoes for the affluent (their “connoisseur” strawberries are six for \$50 on their [WEBSITE](#))
- Vertical Harvest Farms, with operations in Maine and Wyoming
- GoodLeaf Farms in Canada (microgreens and salad mixes from three locations)

There are probably others I'm unaware of ...

Bottom line: You can't say that you've proven that vertical farming can work at scale if you require OPM (other people's money) to keep the LED lights on. The single most fundamental rule of business is that you must make a profit. All these vertical farm operators seemed to have skipped class the day that was covered.



Are CEA growers benefiting from cyclospora?

While writing the piece above, I got curious: Has the cyclospora outbreak blamed on Mexican field-grown lettuce been a benefit to greenhouse and vertical farm growers, who can tout food safety as one of their presumed benefits?

Not necessarily, according to my research, although they don't seem to be hit as hard as field growers (one of whom reportedly plowed his current crop of romaine under). Also, an increase in educational campaigns could help CEA growers long-term.

Overall, the grocery store lettuce category is down about 20%—however, that doesn't distinguish between field-grown and CEA. Fast food sales are down even more, with foot traffic at Taco Bell down almost 30% and salad chain Chopt down 24%. Cava, Panera Bread, Chipotle and Subway have all seen declines. Build-A-Salad in Chattanooga has closed permanently due to a stark drop in sales. Unfortunately, few if any CEA lettuce growers have broken into the large-scale food service companies that supply chains like Taco Bell and Subway.

On the positive side, there's much consumer curiosity about hydroponic CEA lettuce. Gotham Greens told *ModernRetail* that its website traffic was up 800% July 9–19 and they received 1,300 questions via social media and email. In response, they've posted more information on Threads, Facebook and Instagram about their products and how they're produced to “restore confidence in fresh produce.”

Little Leaf Farms has done the same, including videos from founder and CEO Paul Sellew. However, Paul told a Boston television reporter that their sales have dropped by 5% to 10% due to consumer concerns.

“Sales have been impacted. People are afraid of eating lettuce. And we're trying to get the word out about why we are different, why our product is completely safe.”

I put in a request for a comment to BrightFarms, which you may recall I visited earlier this year, but they have not yet replied.



Ball takes over Tradewinds Hibiscus (and more) from Aris

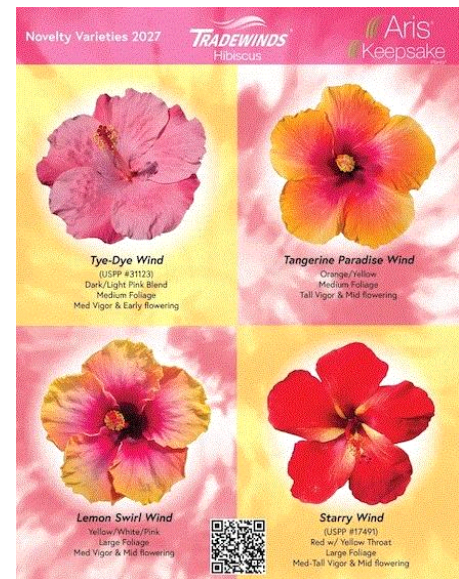
Ball Horticultural Company and Aris Horticulture have announced that Ball has acquired Aris' **Tradewinds Hibiscus** program, from URCs to liners to pre-finished and finished plants. The deal, effective August 3, includes all current and pipeline Tradewinds genetics, the breeding stock, Aris' book of business and the Tradewinds trademark. It also includes some mandevilla and

tropical ferns, helping Ball expand its tropical plant portfolio.

Ball FloraPlant will be handling the future breeding work on the lines, while Ball Seed will handle sales and distribution of URCs, liners and finished plants. They'll also work with selected brokers for finished product distribution. Aris will continue to produce all propagation and finished plants for these programs at their Keepsake Plants location in Alva, Florida, under a long-term production contract.

"This addition strengthens Ball FloraPlant's world-class genetics portfolio and positions us for continued innovation in the tropical category," said Al Davidson, president of Ball Horticultural Company.

"We're very excited about this partnership because Ball brings tremendous resources to the Tradewinds brand," said Scott Schaefer, Aris' president and CEO. "Their organization includes one of the industry's largest horticultural sales teams, extensive marketing capabilities, and world-class breeding and product development resources. Ball's vision is to continue investing in and growing the Tradewinds tropical product line."



At Ball Customer Days

As mentioned, I spent most of last week back in West Chicago at the Mothership to attend the annual Ball Customer Days, which I've only missed once since 1994—when I picked up a dose of COVID at Cultivate in 2022 and had to stay home. Bummer! But I was there this year, with bells on, pressing the flesh, taking loads of pictures and catching up with many of my industry friends who make the drive or flight in.



The weather was set to be perfect on Thursday and a washout on Friday ... but, thankfully, the meteorologists missed the mark by five hours and the Friday rain held off until after lunch. In fact, Friday was the better day overall because the overcast conditions kept temps low and the contrast, too, making for better photography.

As for crowd size ... as Vic Ball used to say, "Big!" I'm told by a very reliable source that Ball had 1,761 guests from 28 states, six Canadian provinces and Germany, the Netherlands and New Zealand.



As usual, we captured the highlights of the event on video, this time with Bill Calkins wielding the *GrowerTalks* microphone and me behind the camera (Jen and Osvaldo were occupied in other video tasks). Following in my footsteps, Bill asked Anna Ball for her favorites, interviewed all the Ball brand ambassadors and generally roamed about looking for stories—such as the sustainable pot planting and Dr. Nathan Jahnke on taking advantage of Ball's testing services.

You can watch the fun- and fact-filled video [HERE](#).

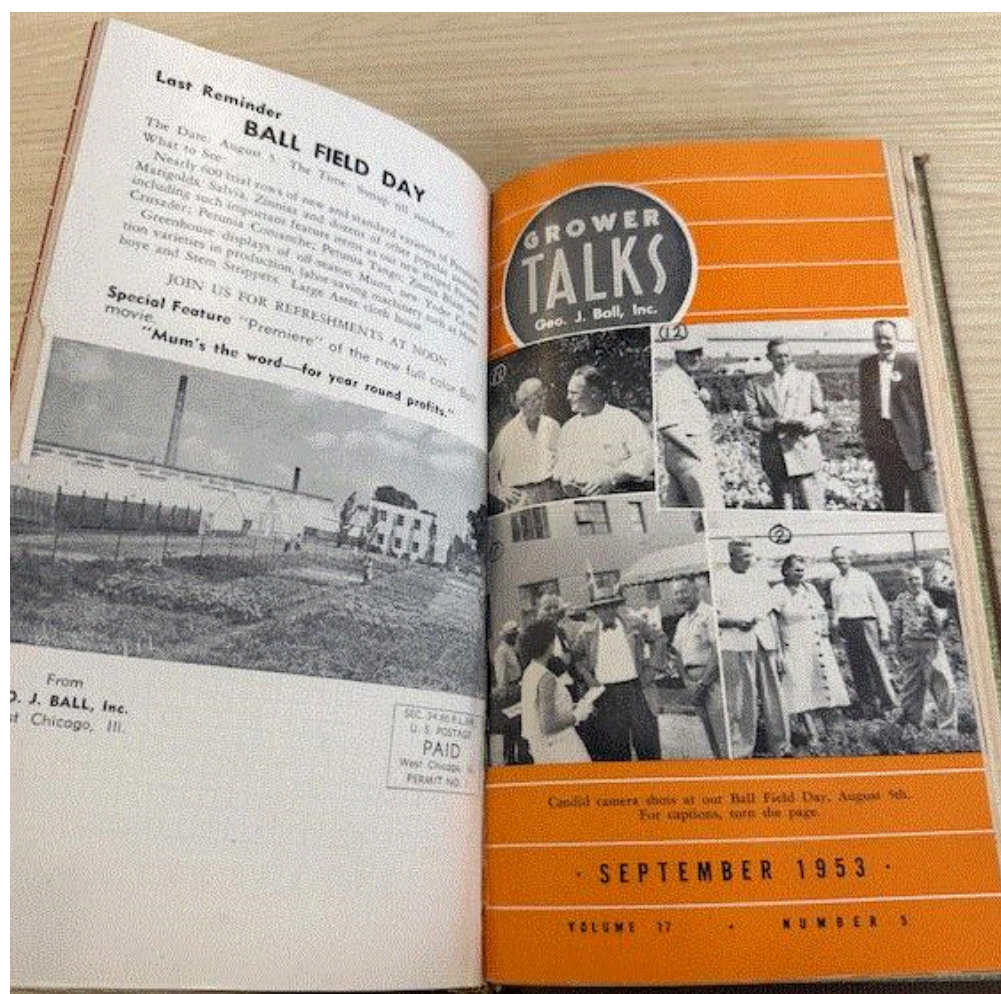


August 5, 1953

One of the questions I've asked Anna on numerous occasions is: "How long have we been hosting Customer Day?" Her answer is generally, "Since the '50s, I think."

That's because nobody is left who knows exactly when Customer Day started. Until now, that is, when I decided to take a deep dive into the *GrowerTalks* archives. After all, the magazine has documented every important event in the history of Ball and the industry since 1937. I was sure I'd find record of the first Customer Day.

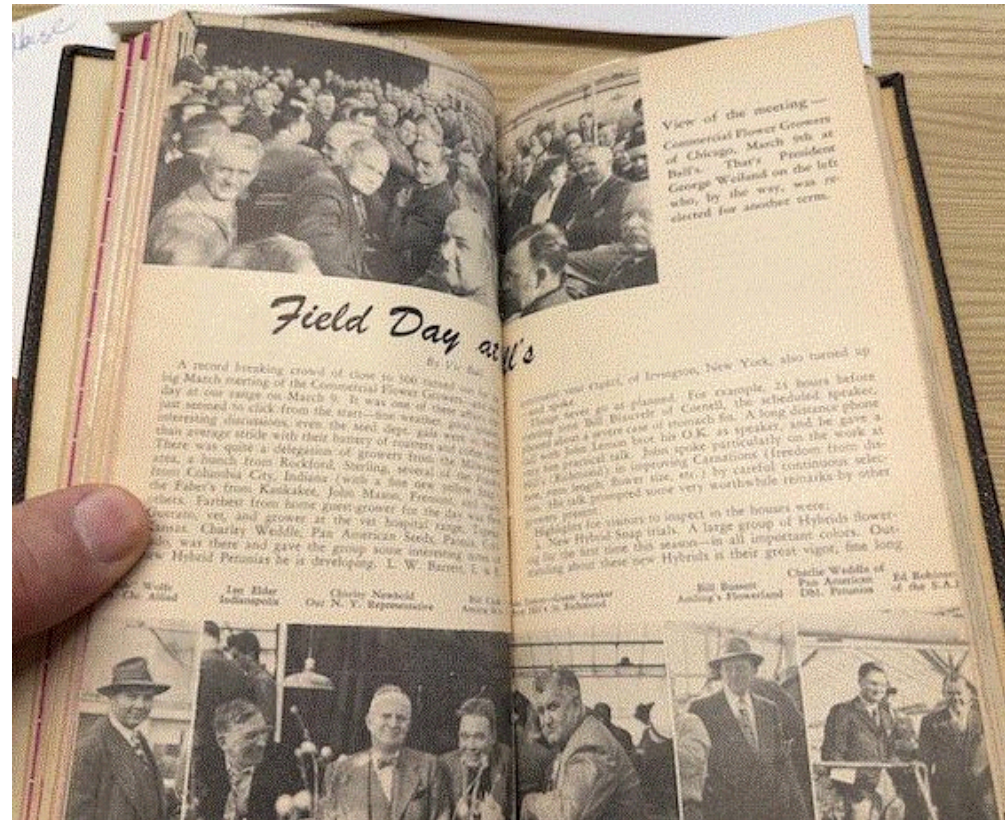
And I did: **August 5, 1953**. It was called "Ball Field Day" (or "Field Day at Ball's" on a few occasions). It was sunup 'til sundown, with refreshments at noon and nearly 600 trial rows of new and standard varieties of petunias, marigolds, salvia, zinnia and dozens of other popular annuals. There were also greenhouse displays of mums, the new Yoder carnations and labor-saving machinery. They even showed a film, "Mums the word" for year-round profits," a 20-minute color-sound motion picture about year-round mum growing.



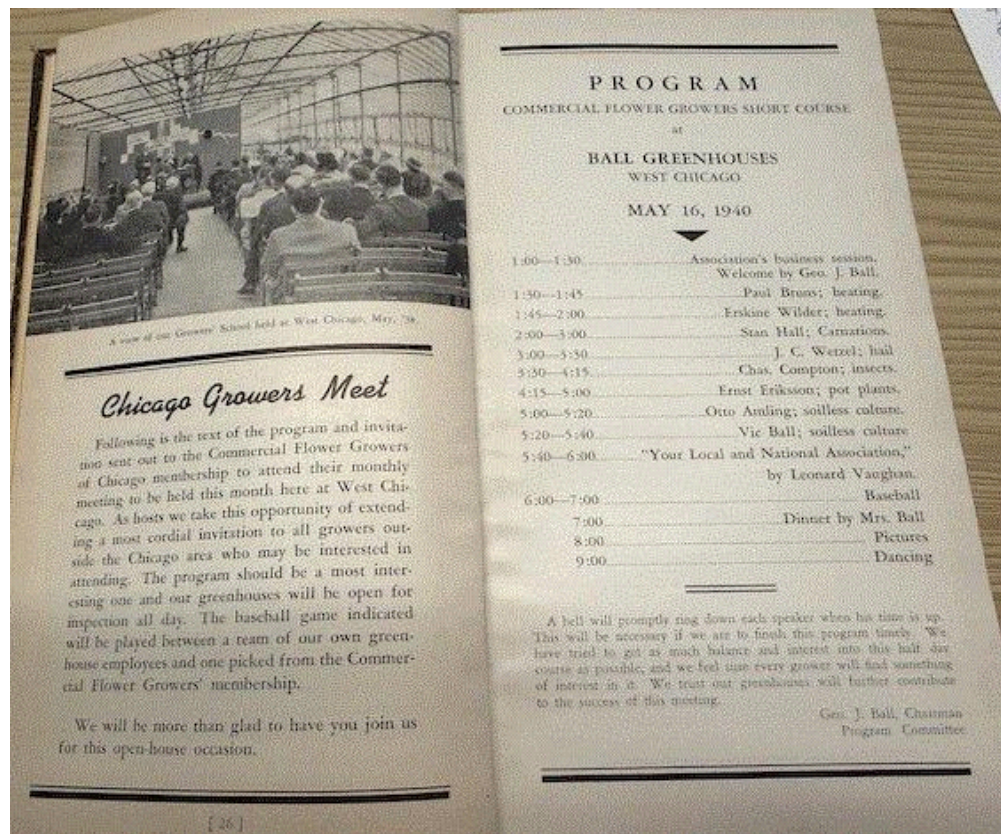
The last reminder (left) of the very first true Field Day at Ball's was on the back page of the August 1953 issue. Photos from the event were featured on the September cover.

Before 1953, they welcomed folks to visit the trial grounds, but on an informal basis, with Vic Ball writing in *GrowerTalks*, "If your summer travel plans include Chicago, be sure to stop in on us at

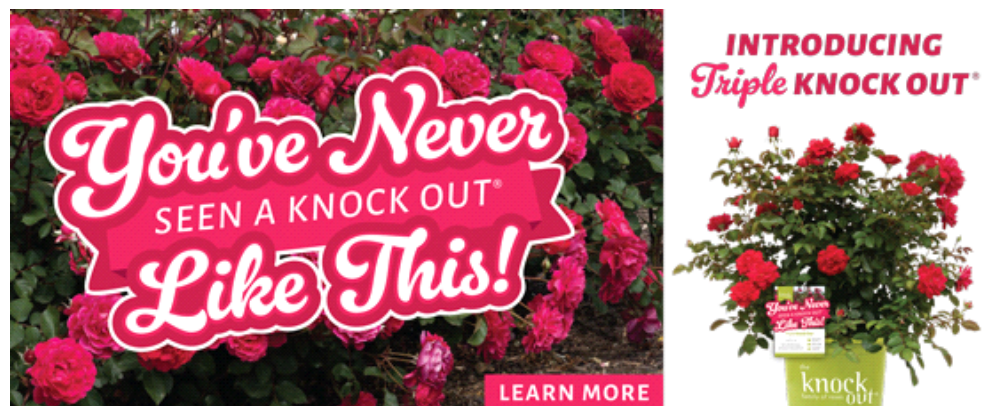
In my research, I discovered another event at Ball that I'm not sure anyone here was aware of: Every March or early April, starting in 1936 (one year before the birth of *GrowerTalks*), Ball played host to the annual **Chicago Flower Growers Short Course**, which included a half day of lectures by guest experts, as well as tours of the greenhouses. But sometimes Vic or his brothers called that "Field Day"—as in this coverage of the 1948 meeting.



Before 1953, "Field Day at Ball's" meant a March or April open house at Ball in collaboration with the Chicago Flower Growers Short Course. That early in the year, there would have been no row trials yet in the ground.



Here, a photo of the '38 Short Course and the agenda for 1940. Note the festive end of the day: baseball, dinner (by Mrs. Ball), pictures and dancing. And, remember, this was a year before we found ourselves embroiled in World War II!



Stemmer features silicon, for strength and stress resilience

Here's a new product you might want to try—especially if you've been curious about the benefits of silicon on crops. It's called Stemmer and it's from BioWorks.

Stemmer is a highly soluble, silicon-based plant-health product said to help reinforce plant cell walls, optimize nutrient and water use efficiency, and enhance crop performance under challenging growing conditions. From salinity and high EC levels to intense solar radiation and temperature extremes, Stemmer provides season-long support that results in greener plants that are better equipped to perform under challenging growing conditions.

That is thanks to silicon. As BioWorks puts it, "Silicon deposition within plant tissues reinforces cell wall architecture, enhancing tissue strength, stem rigidity and overall plant resilience. Increased silicon availability also facilitates the translocation and utilization of relatively immobile nutrients, particularly calcium, supporting cell wall development, tissue quality and improved crop vigor throughout entire lifecycles."



Stemmer is a fully soluble formulation that allows for easy mixing and application across greenhouse, nursery, high tunnel and field production systems.

A few of the benefits as revealed in plant trials:

- In a poinsettia rooting trial, two days after treatment, 80% of Stemmer-treated cuttings had initiated roots, compared to 30% of untreated controls. Seven days after treatment, 100% of Stemmer-treated cuttings had reached transplant-ready status (10-plus roots), while only 80% of untreated cuttings had reached the same stage.
- In two cherry field trials, Stemmer increased the calcium content in leaf tissue by 23% and 31% and had improvements in both leaf structure and fruit quality. The cherries had more uniform color and were reported firmer by the grower in the Stemmer treated fields.

For more product details, trial results and state registration information, visit the Stemmer [product page](#).

Stemmer is available now throughout the U.S. (except California) through authorized BioWorks distributors.

An advertisement for BioTherm, RBI, and Sterling HVAC products. The background is a photograph of a large greenhouse with plants. Overlaid on the image is a red banner with white text. The text reads: "New Project? Build it Efficiently. Heating systems engineered for performance from day one. BioTherm-designed heating systems with RBI boilers and Sterling unit heaters." Below the text are the logos for BioTherm, RBI, and Sterling HVAC Products.

New Project? Build it Efficiently.
Heating systems engineered for performance from day one.
BioTherm-designed heating systems with RBI boilers and Sterling unit heaters.

BioTherm RBI STERLING HVAC PRODUCTS

EHR to distribute leafjoy houseplant to IGCs

The Plant Company, the licensed grower of Proven Winners leafjoy houseplants, has named EHR (formerly Eason Horticultural Resources) as its horticultural brokerage partner in North America. This agreement gives EHR the right to sell and distribute leafjoy to independent garden centers throughout its service network, creating a new route to market for the branded houseplant

program.

Through EHR, IGCs can build assortments in 9-, 12- and 17-cm premium foliage, leafjoy littles, H2O hydroponic designs, Terraform terrariums, Canopy hanging baskets, and Boutique and Collector's Edition selections. Retailers can choose six ready-built trending bundles—Essentials, Traditional, Deco, Climb-itt, H2O Expanded and Glass Only—or customize an à la carte mix.



Plants arrive display-ready with variety-specific labels, care guidance, QR-linked consumer content and Proven Winners marketing support. Atrium, Cocoon, WorkLife and SpaScene collections organize plants around the spaces and conditions in which shoppers will use them, helping retail teams replace guesswork with confidence.

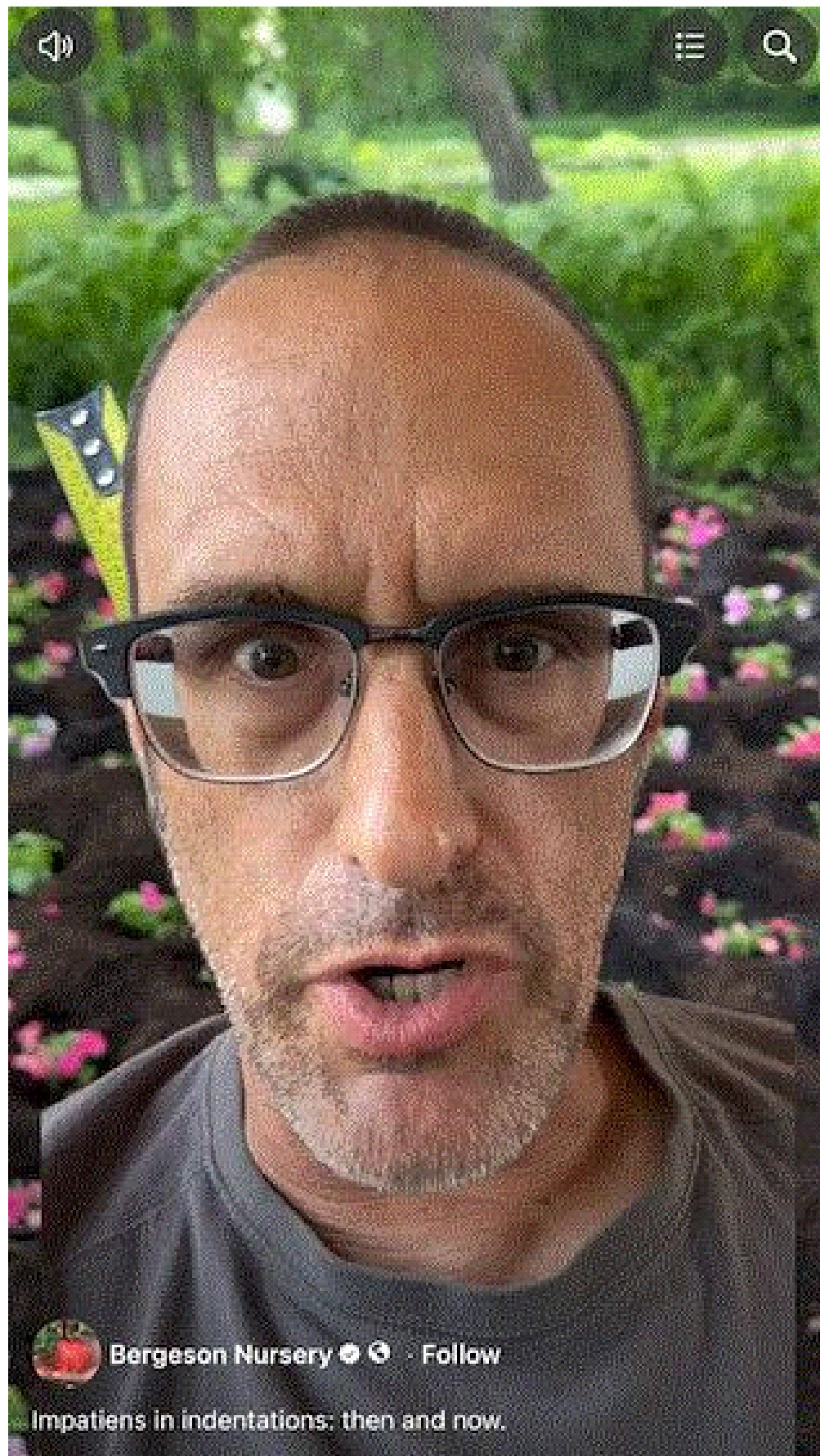
“EHR understands how independent garden centers buy and what it takes to turn a strong product line into a successful retail program,” said Dave Thorne, senior vice president of sales and marketing for The Plant Company. “Their sales team and transportation network can help retailers build and ship the right leafjoy mix for their markets while we deliver the innovation, quality and consistency behind the brand. This is an important step in taking leafjoy to its next level of growth.”

“We’re thrilled to offer a program that provides independent garden centers such a distinctive collection of houseplants with a program that is easy to buy, merchandise and support,” said Chris Berg, director of marketing for EHR. “leafjoy brings together exclusive genetics, retail-ready presentation, consumer education and the power of Proven Winners. EHR adds the local relationships to make that program practical store by store, giving independents a stronger way to compete in houseplants.”

Independent garden centers interested in availability, booking and program options can contact their local EHR sales representative or visit [EHR's WEBSITE](#).



A controversial planting technique



The [Facebook Reel](#) above, from Joe at Minnesota's Bergeson Nursery, has 817,000 views and has definitely gone viral!

What I want to know is, what do you think of the planting technique? Tell me [HERE](#).

Leaving little water rings around each plant makes great sense to me; I think it would be easy to do in a well-prepped bed using one of those drill augers like a [Twist N Plant](#).



Finally ...



Another [FB Reel](#), this time from Deneweth's Garden Center in Michigan. Last I looked, it had 13,100 likes, 432 comments and 1,600 shares. And now me telling my 30,000 closest friends in

66 countries about it.

Got a clever idea? Put it on video and post it to your social! You never know when one will click with the public.

Heliopsis 'Forged in Fire'
New to Proven Winners
Perennials for 2026-2027!



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

See you next time!

Chi

Chris Beytes

Editor-in-Chief

GrowerTalks & Green Profit

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