

On Controls; Monrovia Faves; Cool Tools; A Gardening Song



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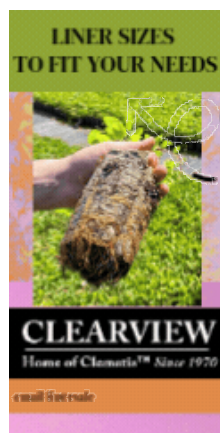
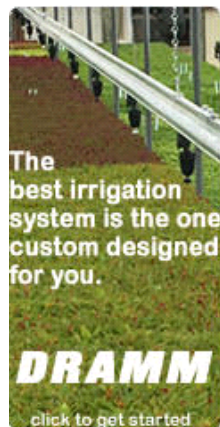


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FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2026

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GrowerTalks' Acres Online

News and Commentary from GrowerTalks Magazine

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Take control!
Top 10 from Monrovia
Growing Plants for Retail
Salary Survey time!
Get our new IMF Guide
Javo's latest filler
A disbudding robot!
This saw likes cutting dirt!
Finally ...



Surfinia



Take control!

I just finished up a feature story on greenhouse controls for the October *GrowerTalks*, and one piece of wisdom from my experts stuck with me. I thought I'd share it as sort of a teaser for the story (which will land in your mailbox in less than a month).

One of my questions was "What features are all the control companies working on delivering to growers?" One feature all my experts agreed on was that controls would become more intuitive and easier to use, more accessible and more adaptable. This will show up in several forms,

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including mobile/remote access (already common with many controls), better sensing, easier interfaces, scalability and systems that can help compensate for the loss of experienced growers. In other words, make sophisticated controls easier for more people to use—and more useful as the operation grows and evolves.

It was Henry Vangameren of Priva who specifically mentioned how controls will help to bridge the experience gap by capturing institutional knowledge.

"Labor shortages and generational turnover mean fewer growers coming up with decades of hands-on climate intuition," he told me. "Manufacturers are responding with tools that translate that expertise into the system itself, so a newer grower can manage more area with more consistent results."

AI will be a big help with that as it converts years of crop data history into future greenhouse climate setting suggestions.

I think that's an important reason to consider investing in a higher level of climate and irrigation control as your business grows. Because while you or your current head grower may be an intuitive master of the crops—veritable poinsettia-whisperers—what about the next batch of growers you hire? Can you train them to be as good as you? Or can your environmental controls, combined with years of historical data of successful crops, help them achieve success (and avoid costly mistakes)?

It's an interesting idea to ponder ... What say you? Will AI-powered environmental controls eventually give new, inexperienced growers a leg up on their careers? Let me know [HERE](#).





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Favorites from Monrovia's Breeder Showcase

Last time, Jen Zurko took us to Monrovia's Centennial Celebration in Dayton, Oregon. One thing she didn't include (because the results weren't yet in) was the voting for favorite varieties on display in their Breeder Showcase, which featured more than a dozen of the world's leading plant breeders and introducers.



Visitors, including retail customers, industry partners and media, got to see more than 400 perennial and shrub varieties in the display and were able to vote via flags for their trial favorites. The echinacea from Bull Plant Genetics must have been in prime condition, as they took three of the top 10 spots.

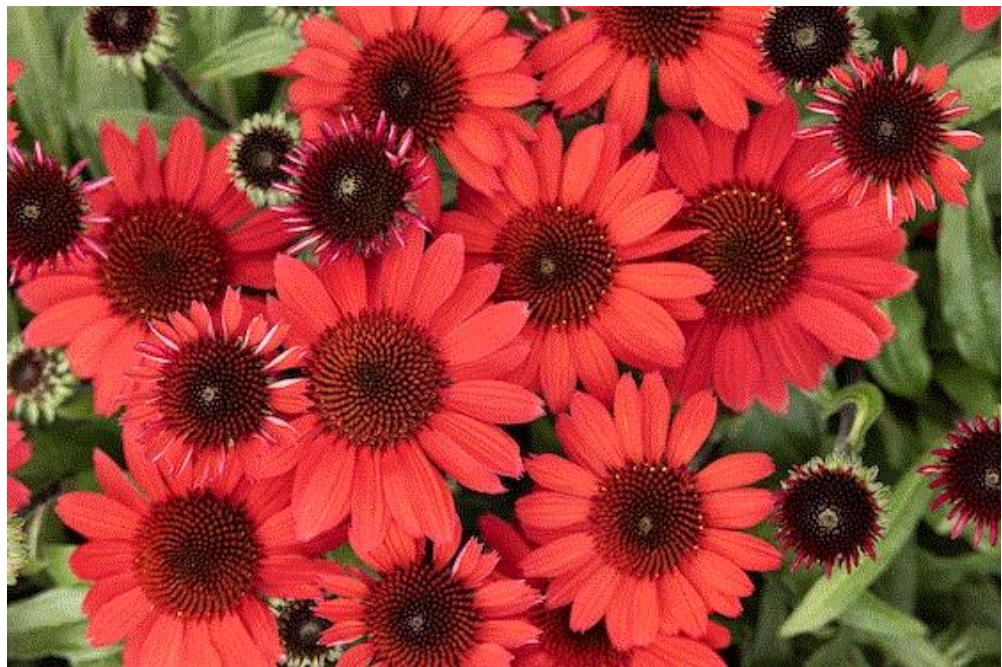
Here are the top 10 favorites (in no particular order, as Monrovia didn't provide the actual vote tally):

Andropogon Black Stallion (Intrinsic Perennials)



A show-stopping perennial grass. Cool green foliage develops purple tones through the year, reaching near-black in fall. Dark purple flower spikes shoot up in late summer. Zones 4-9.

Echinacea SunMagic Vintage Hot Red (Bull Plant Genetics)



The SunMagic series offers an abundance of colorful, long-lasting blooms on a compact, mounding habit. Vintage Hot Red turns heads with its vivid pure-red petals and dark red centers, attracting pollinators like a magnet. Great in borders or containers. Zones 4-9.

Echinacea SunMagic Chocolate Cherry (Bull Plant Genetics)



Chocolate Cherry features bright red petals surrounding a dark chocolate truffle center. The semi-double flowers bloom in abundance and are held above the compact foliage on dramatic dark stems. Zones 4-9.

Echinacea SunMagic Double Hot Pink (Bull Plant Genetics)



Oversized hot pink flowers with full pom-pom centers bloom in abundance on a tight, tidy plant. Zones 4-9.

***Hydrangea paniculata* Little Spooky (Concept Plants)**



A very compact variety: The plant is small, but the blooms are not! An abundance of big white panicles are held on sturdy stems, providing big impact in a small package. Perfect in a pot on a patio or balcony, or mix it with perennials in a garden bed. Zones 4-8.



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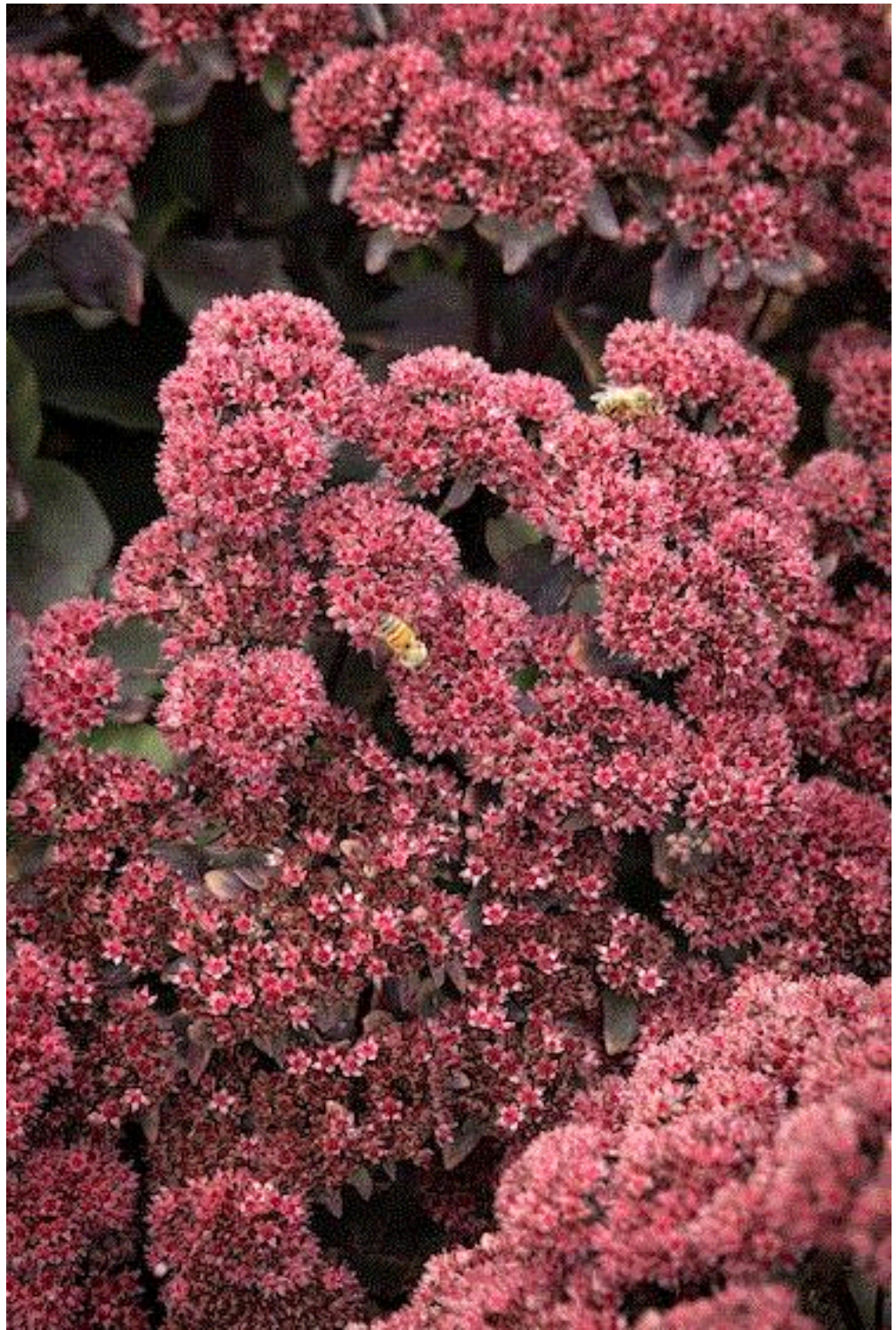
Monrovia top 10 (continued)

Actaea Pink Spike (Monrovia exclusive)



The chocolate-purple foliage of this large perennial makes a striking addition to a shady garden. Long, slender, light pink, fragrant flower spikes tower above the foliage in late summer and fall. Zones 4-9.

Sedum Hot Rocks Dark Leaf Red (Syngenta Flowers)



Enjoy the dark wine-red foliage on this mounding sedum before it is completely hidden by big clusters of deep red flower buds that open to dark pink blooms. This easy-care, water-wise plant is a bee magnet. Zones 4-9.

***Lavandula angustifolia* La Diva Vintage Amethyst (Dümmen Orange)**



A compact variety with an extraordinary amount of blooms over a long period. Clusters of impressively dark buds open to fragrant violet flowers. Great heat and humidity tolerance. Zones 5-9.

Heuchera Fyre Wing Amber (Terra Nova Nurseries)



The Fyre Wing series offers a novel new look for heuchera, with deeply cut, lacy foliage. Amber changes color with the seasons, starting pure amber in the spring and darkening to copper-umber by fall. Flowers lightly with wiry spikes of tiny white blooms. Zones 4-9.

***Hydrangea macrophylla* Centennial Ruby (Monrovia exclusive)**



A special release to celebrate Monrovia's 100th anniversary, the flowers of this hydrangea are simply stunning. The rich ruby-red mophead blooms deepen in color as the long-lasting flowers age, sometimes taking on almost black hues. Exceptionally sturdy and compact, with strong stems and thick green leaves. Zones 4-9.



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Growing Plants for Retail Success (a livestream)

Register now and mark your calendar for a livestreamed panel discussion hosted by yours truly and guest moderator Jack Bobo from peat and media company Berger.

GROWING PLANTS FOR RETAIL SUCCESS is scheduled for 1 p.m. Eastern/Noon Central on Wednesday, September 30.

This webinar is all about selecting a substrate that will help your plants get off to a strong start and stay strong all the way through the retail garden center.

Joining me and Jack will be Andrew Butler of Green Valley Greenhouses in Ramsey, Minnesota, and Mike Busch of Meyers Farms in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. The conversation will explore how today's substrate choices—including mixes incorporating wood fiber—can strengthen root development, improve moisture management and enhance overall plant resilience. Our experts will share practical insights drawn directly from their own production systems, highlighting what works, what doesn't and how these materials behave from propagation all the way through retail.



You'll come away with real-world strategies for growing plants that hold their quality long after they leave your greenhouse.

Shout out to the team at Berger for sponsoring this livestream!

Learn more and register [HERE](#).



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Please take our Salary Survey!

Every year since ... gosh, I've lost track—the '90s, for sure—we've conducted *GrowerTalks'* annual Salary & Benefits Survey to help you do a better job compensating your staff. And for the last few years we've done it in partnership with AmericanHort to help us provide a high-level and more useful tool for you. Industry Insights crunches the data for us.

Companies like yours that take the survey can better understand salary and benefit trends and see how your business compares to other survey participants. The survey includes company demographics, staffing, and benefits and salary data on multiple job titles across full-time, part-time and seasonal employees.

But in order for us to provide the best data to you, we need you to participate!

You don't have to be an AmericanHort member to benefit—all survey respondents will get the full report prepared by Industry Insights. And you don't have to be a certain-size operation—anyone and everyone can participate! Also, if you've participated in taking the survey in previous years, some data will automatically be populated for you, saving you time.

Other benefits to taking the survey:

- You'll gain stronger hiring and retention strategies.
- It'll help you develop improved planning and better budgeting.
- Access to a personalized company compensation comparison report, which is free for eligible AmericanHort Premium members who complete the survey.
- And, of course, key parts of the data will be published in the December issue of *GrowerTalks* (January for the retail report in *Green Profit*).

[CLICK HERE](#) to fill out the survey (which is confidentially collected and maintained by Industry Insights' professional data team and securely stored).

Again, the survey is open until September 30, so don't delay!



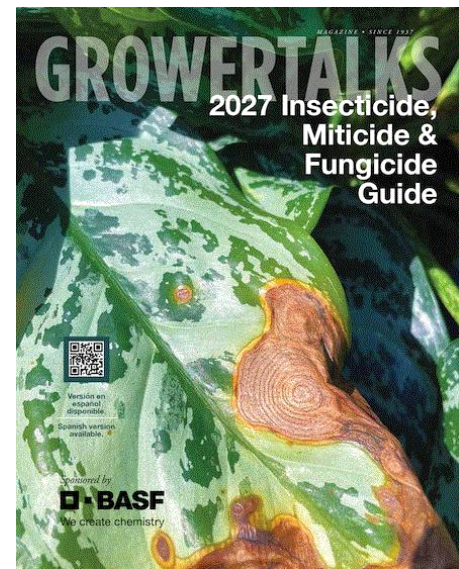
Latest IMF Guide is here! Download it today

IMF means Insecticide, Miticide and Fungicide, and those are what we cover thoroughly in the 2027 version of our [Insecticide, Miticide & Fungicide Guide](#). It just came out with the September issue of *GrowerTalks*, but you can also access it online.

As for content, this year's IMF Guide starts with a customer story that showcases Willoway Nursery's growing operation, highlighting how a collaborative plant health team advances its approach through experience, curiosity and a willingness to try new solutions. Their work reflects the industry's shift toward integrated strategies that blend targeted chemistries with biological tools to solve problems while balancing production demands.

The guide then moves into key production topics, including crop management considerations and emerging pest challenges that influence day-to-day decisions. It concludes with practical resources, including updated product use charts and rotation-focused tools that can simplify decisions and support resistance management.

Check it out [HERE](#).



Javo's latest pot filler

Trade show season won't kick off until January, but I didn't want to make you wait that long to share the latest in pot filling technology introduced by Javo, called Javo Orange Orbis. "Orange" is the Dutch company's signal word for products featuring a modular, future-ready design that

offers maximum production and maximum flexibility, along with fast changeovers and quality construction.

Orbis is the first in the new filler line—it's a programmable modular potting machine with a circular pot track suitable for an amazingly wide range of pot diameters, from 3 in. to 14 in., filling up to 8,000 pots per hour. A new elevator design guarantees an optimal soil supply of 3–40 cubic meters. Its continuous soil supply ensures accurate and consistent pot filling, contributing to higher plant quality. In addition, the elevator effortlessly handles a wide range of soil types.



A highlight of the machine is how quickly changeovers between pot sizes can be achieved, thanks to advanced servo-motor technology and fixed pot centers. The user-friendly touchscreen allows you to adjust settings with ease and select the desired pre-programmed potting recipes in a single operation. And its modular design makes it easy to add both current options and future upgrades. In addition, remote support is available to provide fast and efficient assistance from a distance.

As for price, I haven't been able to get one from Javo ... it's probably one of those "it depends" situations. With all that touch-screen automation and connectivity capability, it's certainly not a going to be a cheap machine. This is for growers looking for maximum efficiency.

Learn more [HERE](#).

A banner advertisement for BioTherm heating systems. The top half shows a greenhouse interior with hanging plants. The bottom half 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.

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Zentoo Chrysanthemum's disbudding robot

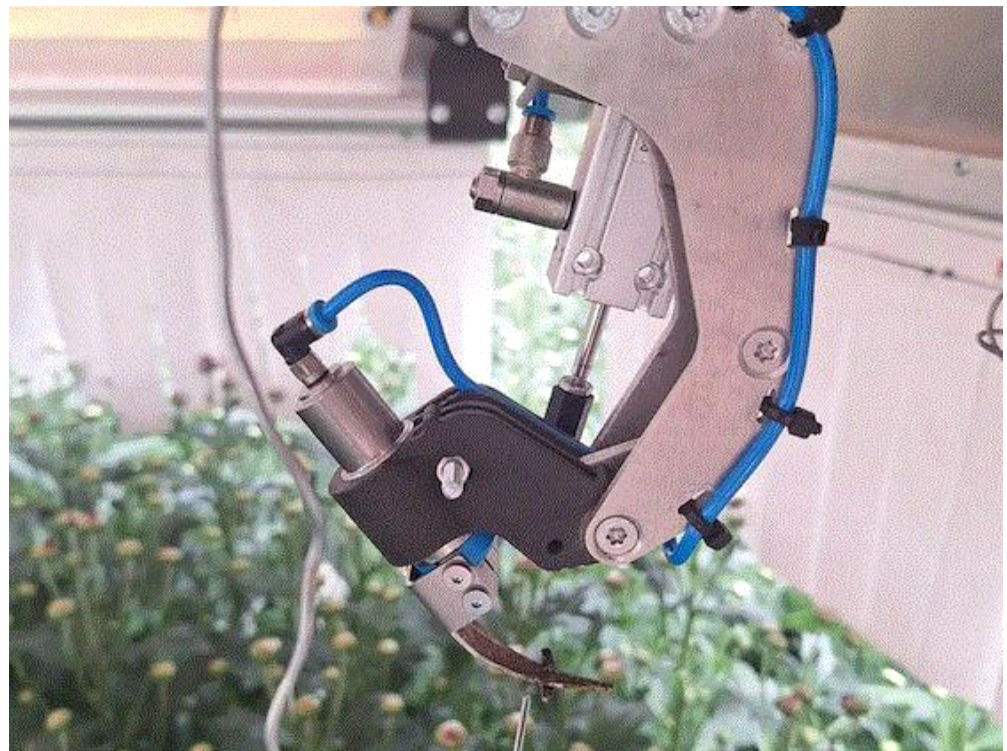
Have you ever disbudded a mum crop? I have ... used to have to do it every week, in fact (although generally we had a lady who came in part time to do it). It's not easy or fun ... but when growing a pot or cut mum crop it's pretty important for getting nice even sprays of mums ... and it's essential when growing big cushions.

That's why I was fascinated to see what I think is the world's first disbudding robot in a video from Zentoo Chrysanthemum, a collective of cut mum growers in the Netherlands that has invested with the company [Wikotech](#) to build it.



Apparently they showed it off in an open house a year ago July, which I heard nothing about, so it's still new to me.

Called the Wikoknoprobot, or the button robot, it has three robotic arms that can remove the top bud on up to 5,000 spray mums per hour, operating day or night. They say one unit replaces two employees and delivers consistent results 24/7.



Now, could this work on potted mums? Probably—if you did enough of them to justify the cost. And will they ever make a robot that leaves the top bud and takes all the rest, for big cushion flowers? I'd say anything is possible!

See it in action [HERE](#).



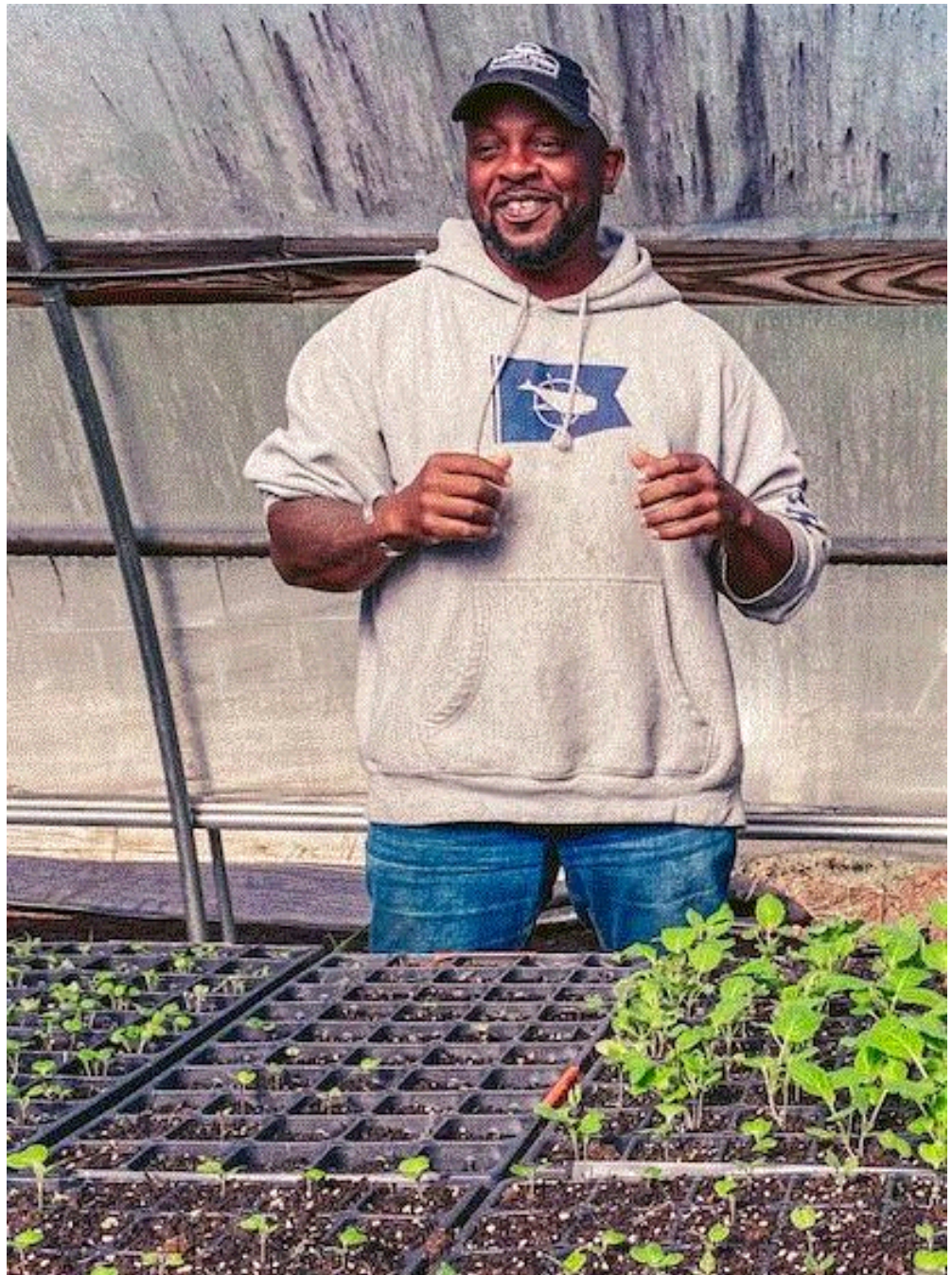
Quotable quotes

"I knew I needed to fail at something every day," said Army Ranger veteran Jon Jackson.

So he started a farm.

In 2010, Jon Jackson founded Comfort Farms, a 25-acre therapeutic farm and Veterans Crisis Agricultural Center in Milledgeville, Georgia. Named in honor of Jon's fallen friend Army Captain Kyle Comfort, the farm operates under the non-profit Stag Vets to help combat veterans heal from PTSD and traumatic brain injuries through agro-cognitive behavioral therapy and hands-on farming.

I heard that quote in a PBS video (about heirloom okra, believe it or not) and I immediately jotted it down, recognizing its goodness—it was so fitting to what you in agriculture experience every day, whether your goal is producing perfect plugs or poinsettias, or helping combat veterans cope with life.



Jon Jackson knows farming is hard work. Photo: Visit Milledgeville

It also reminds me of the grower who told me he doesn't show up at the greenhouse each day hoping there are no problems, he shows up at the greenhouse looking to solve the problems that he knows are there.

That is the attitude that will make you successful in this business ... or will at least help you keep your sanity when things seem to be falling apart around you.

buy

An amazing tool for the landscape

Okay, guys and gals—show of hands: How many of you have dulled or ruined a handsaw or chainsaw blade by trying to cut through tree roots or by cutting off a stump below the soil level? Yep, count me in. The dirt just kills 'em.

Well here's a solution: The [Arbortech Allsaw](#). Made by Australian company Arbortech, it's an oversized cordless oscillating saw with large interchangeable carbide blades that will cut through wood, sod, soil, concrete blocks and even some stones. It looks plenty powerful, running as it does on Dewalt 60v batteries. They offer it in a landscape kit and also a masonry kit.



It's not cheap at \$1,350 on [Amazon](#), but talk about a time-, blade- and back-saver!

Like I said, amazing!

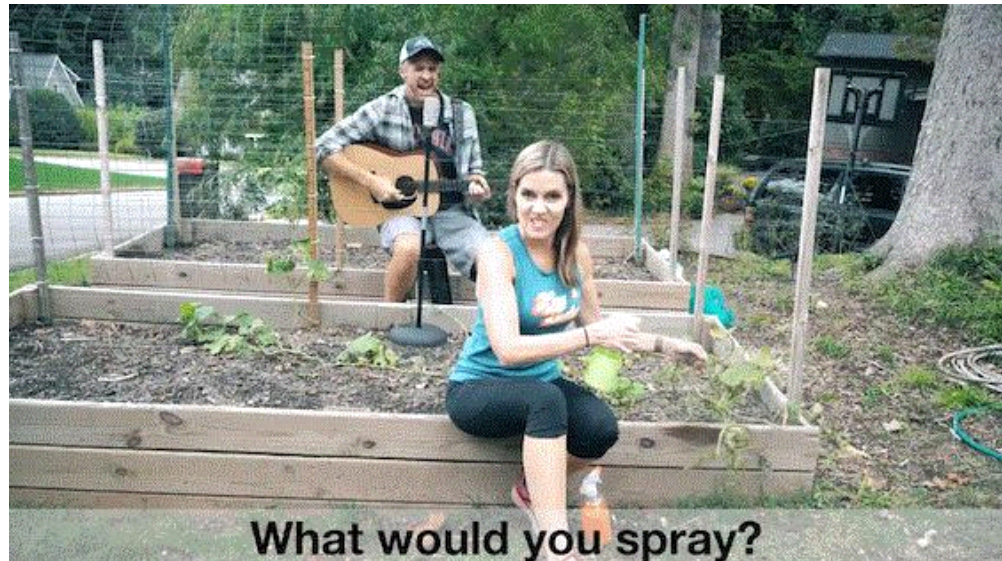


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Finally ...



You know I like a fun video—this is from the Holderness Family, a husband-and-wife duo who have gotten famous on YouTube doing humorous song parodies about parenting, marriage, aging, Costco, pickleball, dieting and more.

THIS ONE one caught my attention because it's about yard work, featuring a medley of several Dave Matthews tunes, including "What Would You Spray" (to the tune of "What Would You Say"):

What would you spray? (*you prefer organic?*)
To make the bugs go away? (*maybe try some neem oil*)
Your tomatoes that they ate (*apple cider vinegar*)
What would you spray?

A little levity for the fall growing season!



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

See you next time!

Chris Beytes
Editor-in-Chief
GrowerTalks & Green Profit

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