

West Coast Insider, Substrates Livestream & More





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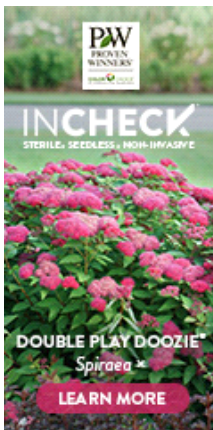
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News and commentary for the nursery & landscape market





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Nursery & LANDSCAPE INSIDER

News and Commentary for the landscape and nursery market

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Farwest Recap
IPPS Western Region
2027 IMF Guide
Salary & Benefits Survey
Grower Livestream Panel
S3 Students



Farwest from the West Coast Bureau

With so much nursery action out west this month, Nursery & Landscape Insider is in need of a West Coast bureau. Dr. Lloyd Nackley was happy to step in for this issue, serving as our very own West Coast Insider. Lloyd's first report comes from the Farwest show in Portland.

Farwest is the largest nursery trade show in the West, bringing thousands of growers, suppliers, researchers and other plant people together under one very large roof. I've attended for about 10 years, which means I now spend almost as much time catching up with people as I do looking at plants. That seems appropriate for an industry built around multi-generational businesses. After a decade, some of the people I first met working alongside their parents are now running booths and companies themselves.

One of my regular stops is the New Varieties Showcase. The judges' top selection this year was Saturnalia American hybrid oak, while Sofia Cherry Laurel won the People's Choice Award.



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Candybox Chilean Guava, Centennial Ruby Hydrangea and DreamScape Smooth Hydrangea also received Awards of Merit.



Saturnalia American hybrid oak—the judge's top selection for 2026.

A cherry laurel winning the crowd may sound a little like a minivan winning a car show—it isn't the flashiest plant in the room, but Oregon growers know exactly why people buy them. Cherry laurels are reliable, useful and commercially important. For a crop worth more than \$25 million annually in Oregon, glossy green foliage can look a lot like the color of money.



Sophia Cherry Laurel won the People's Choice Award.

The booths deserve their own competition and some exhibitors go all out. Eschenfelder Farms won the Ted Van Veen Best in Show Booth Award this year. Little Prince of Oregon Nursery, Youngblood Nursery, Bailey Nurseries and several others also received booth honors. At their best, the displays make you temporarily forget that everything had to be hauled into a convention center, assembled in a day and then dismantled almost immediately. Think of these hardworking folks the next time you find yourself grumbling about putting up the Christmas lights after Thanksgiving.



Farwest also gave our OSU crew several chances to contribute. At the Solution Center, our North Willamette Research & Extension Center interns—Eric, Brian and Lucy—shared what they'd worked on during the summer. Ph.D. student Zoie appeared at Career Boulevard to explain what graduate school in nursery production is actually like. (Hopefully, she described it in a way that still encouraged people to apply.)

Farwest is always a lot to take in: new plants, equipment, research, sales and conversations happening all at once. By the time it ends, I usually leave with more business cards and far more ideas than I have time to pursue. I assume that means the show worked.



Plant Propagators Loose in Utah

Since Dr. Nackley had done such a good job reporting on Farwest, I thought why not solicit him to report on the IPPS Western Region Meeting. Of course, he did a great job.

After Farwest, I hopped on a plane for the International Plant Propagators' Society Western Region Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah. Around 200 people attended, which is a manageable number until you release all of them into a garden at once.



I had a great time hanging out with Dr. Nackley and his technician Clint Taylor during my short trip to IPPS in Salt Lake City.

IPPS operates under the motto "Seek and Share," and its members take both instructions seriously. Speakers come largely from within the group, nursery tours are woven into the meeting and bus rides provide plenty of time to compare notes with growers, propagators, researchers and whoever happens to sit beside you. Some IPPS days can run remarkably long, but plant people seem capable of spending nearly unlimited time discussing how other plant people grow plants.

I also ran into a familiar face: *Nursery & Landscape Insider* editor himself Jeb Fields. Apparently, it wasn't enough for Jeb to present to the Southern IPPS; he wanted to come way out west to spread the good word about stratified substrates. Naturally, I took notes. It seemed wise to know to pay attention before temporarily taking over his newsletter.

No surprise to regulars of this newsletter, Jeb gave a great presentation to Western growers how layering different materials within a container can influence water movement and plant production.

Chris Currey from Iowa State University also gave an engaging presentation on plant growth regulators. PGRs can be extremely useful, provided you select the right product, rate, timing, crop and environmental conditions. Other than that, they're perfectly straightforward. Chris did an excellent job translating the science into practical information growers could take home and use.

The most memorable demonstration, however, may have been unplanned.



At one of our first stops, the renovated gardens at Temple Square, roughly 80 plant propagators got off the buses and spread through the grounds like butterflies. People clustered around flowers, inspected bedding plants and leaned in for closer looks at petunias. Apparently, this behavior seemed suspicious enough that security personnel came out to investigate. Everything had been properly arranged and the situation was quickly resolved. The security staff simply hadn't anticipated that 80 adults would voluntarily gather around bedding plants with that much enthusiasm. Clearly, they've never met people from the IPPS.

That little incident captured the meeting surprisingly well. IPPS members notice plants. They want to know what something is, where it came from, how it was propagated and whether they might be able to grow it themselves. Put them on a tour and they'll scatter toward anything interesting, possibly fast enough to attract official attention.

So Jeb—your western readers are doing well. They're still seeking, still sharing and, when necessary, explaining themselves to security.

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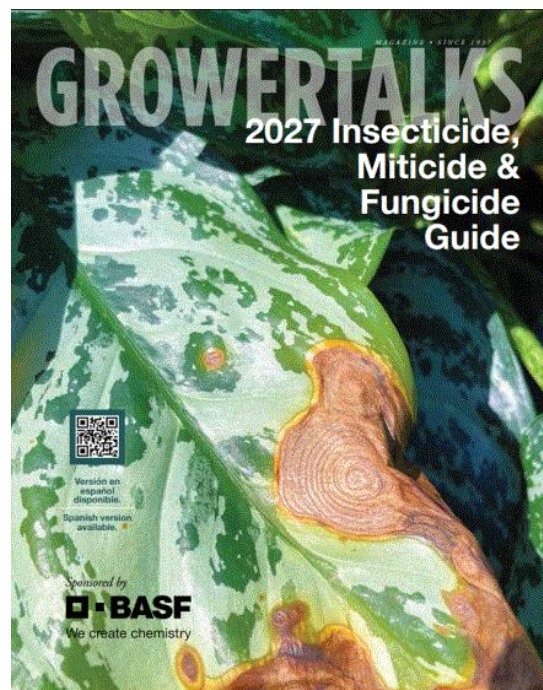
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2027 Insecticide, Miticide & Fungicide Guide Available Now

If you've had a chance to flip through your September issue of *GrowerTalks* (and I know you have), you might have noticed the new 2027 Insecticide, Miticide & Fungicide Guide that was packaged with the issue. Every year, *GrowerTalks* puts together this informative guide, which features guest columns, new information and updates to all chemical pest control labels you'll need to know for your business.

This guide is an invaluable tool as you're building your pest management strategies for the coming year(s). If you don't get *GrowerTalks* in the mail (you should, it's free), don't fret. You can find this free resource online [HERE](#).

While you're at it, [check out all the other guides available](#). These are truly great resources without too much filler—just facts and information. The guide is sponsored by BASF.



VIBRANT

It's Salary & Benefits Survey Time!

GrowerTalks/Green Profit are partnering with AmericanHort again to bring you the Salary & Benefits Survey—a decades-old survey to help us provide you a high-level and more useful tool for you. With this survey, companies like yours can better understand salary and benefit trends and see how their businesses compare 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! The survey is open until September 30.

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*).

[GO 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!



Grower Panel: Growing Plants for Retail Success

Mark your calendars—*GrowerTalks* will be hosting a Grower Panel: Growing Plants for Retail Success. This is going to be a grower livestream planned for September 30 at 1:00 p.m. Eastern/Noon Central. The session will be moderated by Jack Bobo from Berger who'll be joined by two top-of-the-line growers who will discuss how today's substrate choices can strengthen root development, improve moisture management and enhance overall plant resilience.

Andrew Butler of Green Valley Greenhouses in Ramsey, Minnesota, and Mike Busch of Meyers Farms in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, will be the growers on the panel. They'll share practical insights drawn directly from their production systems and highlight what works and what doesn't. They'll also share how these new substrate materials behave from propagation through retail. Attendees of this free livestream will come away with real-world strategies for growing plants that hold quality long after they leave the greenhouse.

The livestream is sponsored by Berger and is sure to be worth a watch. Sign up [HERE](#).



S3 Students

We're going to get back into highlighting students working on the Soilless Substrate Science project. This week, we have George Buss from North Carolina State University.

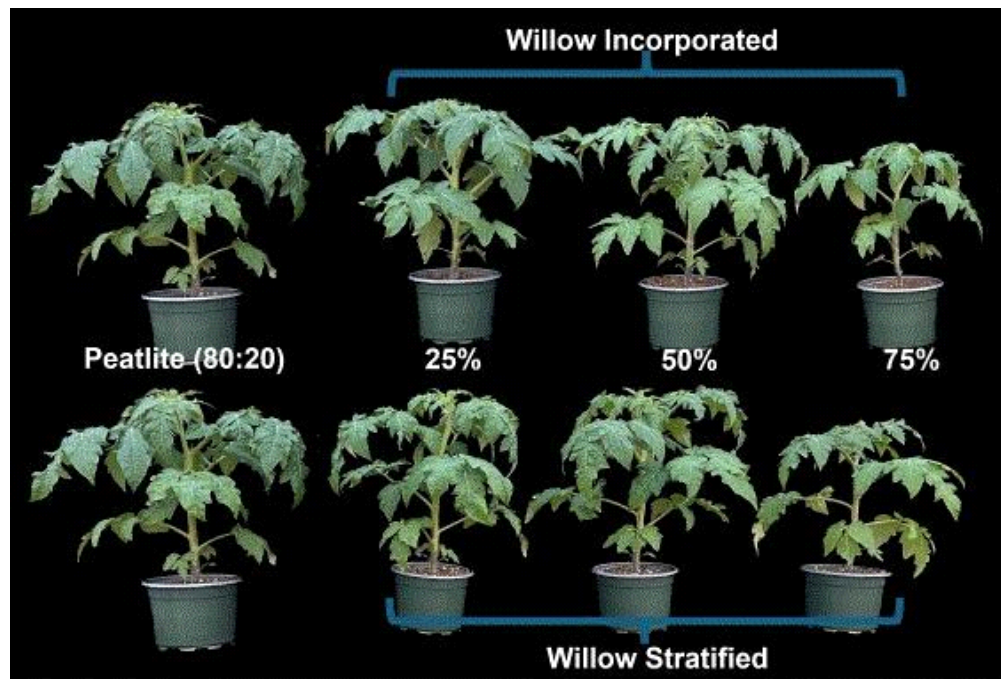
I'm currently a master's student working with Dr. Brian Jackson in the Horticultural Substrates Lab at North Carolina State University. I recently completed the first year of my program, where my research has focused on evaluating different wood species as soilless

substrate components and investigating how the physical placement of wood materials within a container influences plant growth.

One of my recent projects examined the use of willow biomass (*Salix* spp.) as a substrate component for greenhouse crop production. We selected willow because of its established use as a short-rotation bioenergy crop, its ability to produce large amounts of biomass in a relatively short period of time and its tolerance of a wide range of environmental conditions. As the S3 project seeks to identify feasible domestic substrate materials, willow represents a promising renewable resource that could help meet the increasing demand for soilless substrates.



For the willow project, we first processed coarse willow tree chips through a hammermill before creating substrate blends of 25%, 50% or 75% (by volume) processed willow wood amended to peat. The wood inclusion rates were replicated using two potting methods: incorporated or stratified. At each inclusion rate, the incorporated and stratified treatments contained the same amount of willow; the only difference was its physical location within the container. Greenhouse growth trials have been conducted (Fall 2025 and Spring 2026) using different plant species, container sizes and production times.



The growth trials have produced several interesting results. During a short three-week growth trial, tomato and marigold plants grown in stratified substrates containing up to 75% willow wood performed comparably to plants grown in the peatlite control, whereas for the incorporated wood treatments, plant growth was comparable only up to the 50% inclusion rate, above which plant growth was reduced.

Results from a longer six-week growth trial yielded slightly different crop responses. Tomato growth was reduced at willow inclusion rates of 50% and greater in both the incorporated and stratified treatments, whereas marigold growth remained comparable to the control at inclusion rates up to 75% regardless of how the willow wood was amended in the substrate/container.

Taken together, these trial results demonstrate that willow wood has strong potential to be a domestically sourced renewable feedstock for substrate use. In all growth trials (and across all species and container sizes) up to ~50% willow wood produced plants of equal size and quality regardless of inclusion method, which is comparable to previous works on several conifer tree species that have been evaluated as wood substrates.

It's also likely that management practices (optimized irrigation and fertility) could be modified (dialed in) to further enhance plant growth at even higher rates of wood. These findings also suggest that wood incorporation method may influence the amount of wood that can be used in substrates, especially for short-term crop production—a concept I'm currently investigating.

Think big,



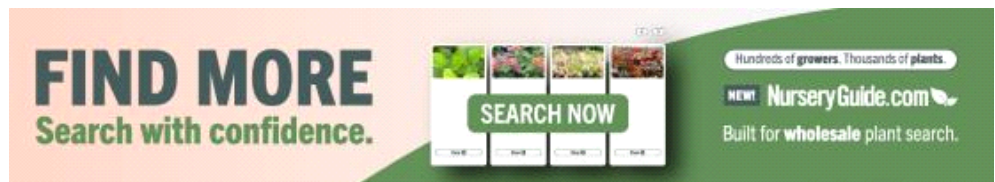
Jeb Fields

Editor-at-Large

Nursery & Landscape Insider

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