

Geese, Fall Event takeaways, expanding the spring sales runway and an IGC rave





Green Profit's **buzz!**

Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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Porch Geese Update

Call us obsessed with porch geese! Jen Polanz has more information about these fabulously outfitted feathered friends.

I know this isn't the most pressing breaking news, but I'm completely fascinated by the resurgence of these finely wardrobed stone feathered friends.

While I was in Atlanta a couple of weeks ago, I spotted some in the [Gersen Company](#) showroom, which was being broken down to make room for new products. I reached out to President and Owner Jim Gerson, who sent info about their line of "Dress Me Up Porch Goose," which includes a boxed set featuring a 24-in. goose and six outfits. That goose is joined by an 18-in. tabletop edition and an 11-in. desktop edition, all that can come in the boxed set with six appropriately sized outfits. Retailers can also offer their customers a Dress-Me-Up Station that has a display rack and 64 individually packaged clothing items (geese sold separately).

Jim said the 24-in. goose sold separately from the outfits is available for holiday sales, and the 11-in. goose box set *may* be available, too. He added most of their volume is for spring sales.



I also spotted geese at both Petitti Garden Centers locations we visited on The Garden Center Group Fall Event retail tour (more on that in a minute). This was at Bainbridge, and these are Giddy the goose, with signage saying, "Giddy has landed—now at Petitti's."

I don't know how long the goose craze will last, but people sure seem to have fun dressing them up (there are whole Facebook groups dedicated to them)!



The Fall Event

JP continues with her trip report to The Garden Center Group's Fall Event.

Speaking of [The Garden Center Group](#) Fall Event, I was thrilled to see a couple hundred people descending onto The Land (Cleveland, for the uninitiated) for 3.5 days of conference and tour, all with the common theme of Connection. I hope our fair city left a good impression. Of course, I have many takeaways from the event—in generalities, because if you really want the really good stuff, you have to join and take part yourself. Here are a few:

- Time and again, a couple of key points came up, namely inventory control, along with controlling wages and wage benefits as two ways to improve profitability. Making sure you understand those two metrics and how to keep them under control will go a long way. One thing I continually see and hear on the inventory control side (not just at the Group Event, but out in the industry), especially for live goods, is having individual pots tagged to be able to scan them at the register. Whether you work with your grower on it, or do it yourself, it can help you tremendously in understanding how much you are selling (or not) of a certain plant. Which really becomes valuable when you need to reorder—then you can keep the winners and dump the losers. On the hardgoods side, some retailers are now reducing their SKUs to simplify the choice, both for the customer and for the employee working the sales floor. Something to consider. Also, looking at ways to save on operating expenses goes right to the bottom line.

- Independent retailers have a huge advantage when it comes to authenticity and education. One of my biggest lessons I'm seeing is keeping the AI for the back-end stuff (I heard a lot of great strategies for AI), but make sure your customer-facing communication is authentic.
- Getting specific, **American Beauties Native Plants** had a booth as a sponsor, and they are introducing a new fall program called Fuel the Migration that features keystone native plants that can help birds during their migration journey. The plants are designed to provide shelter, seeds, nectar and berries to traveling birds. The signage is great, and the plants can help provide a feel-good boost for fall sales.



I have more from the Fall Event and highlights from my visit at Mulberry Creek Herb Farm in Huron, Ohio, but I am cranking on an awesome November issue of *Green Profit* right now, so more to come next week!

Thanks for your trip (and goose) report, JP!



A Longer Spring Sales Window with AI

Friend and industry consultant Clint Albin, founder of **A24 Consulting**, wants you to reframe the way you think about spring sales. He's suggesting to switch your thinking from the good-spring-weather-dependent sales window with a 24-week spring commerce model that starts when the new year does, January 1. This essentially doubles the active spring sales period.

"But Clint, there's a foot of snow outside." That matters for the traditionally compressed, weather-dependent sales window. Clint is suggesting looking at the sales window as something that is not dependent on getting a trowel in the ground. Instead, he suggests garden retailers use AI to capture consumer intent as soon as they begin their garden planning, months before plants and products are on the sales floor.

"Historically, garden centers treated winter workshops as \$35 'make-and-take' events simply to fill cold seats," Clint said. "Under this 24-week AI commerce model, these sessions become strategic engines for spring merchandise, using AI design tools and early consultations to turn a \$35 workshop into a \$1,500 pre-ordered landscape project."

He's proposing a two-phase, 24-week:

Phase 1—Consumer Intent from January 1–March 31: This phase is driven by AI commerce and interactive planning to engage home gardeners through various means such as digital landscape design, AI plant consultations, project planning, wish lists, pre-orders and advance reservations.

Phase 2—Retail Fulfillment beginning April 1: This stage focuses on plant pickup, product delivery, landscape installation and ongoing plant care support.

"The plants don't have to be sitting on the sales floor on January 1, but the customer relationship does," Clint added. "This gives growers earlier visibility into real demand, allows allied suppliers to be integrated into complete project packages, and helps landscape contractors secure commitments well ahead of peak season."

Interesting! I like the mental and programmatic shift in sales focus and giving yourself a longer runway.

Last week Clint started a 95-day countdown to January 1 on various social media platforms, releasing daily strategic insights and advice that will help you understand and get you ready for this reframed spring sales window. You can follow Clint's daily insights about this reframed runway on LinkedIn [HERE](#).

Said Clint about this extended 24-week sales window, "The industry doesn't have to change everything on January 1, but it needs to prove that something important can work differently. If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got."



Holiday Workshop Signage

Before we commence to start our spring sales season on January 1, there's a lot of year-end holiday planning and sales to see through completion. It's certainly not too early to talk about the year-end holidays. In fact, I just registered for an upcoming NRF Winter Holiday Consumer Outlook Webinar.

As Katie Elzer-Peters has been professing for months now, crafting is the latest craze, and holiday wreath-making workshops (i.e. crafting) are poised to be popular events in the next few months. You'll need both print and digital signage to spread the word about your workshops and events.

Liz King of the Stylish Sign Shop tells me that she has an entire kit devoted to holiday wreath-making workshops. The [Evergreen Collection | Wreath-Making Workshop Kit](#) includes customizable signs and social media assets, as well as workshop sign-up templates. "I designed the kits to take the heavy lift off garden centers with their upcoming holiday workshops," Liz told

me.



Here's an example of one of several variations of the holiday wreath-making signage that is available in the kit.

The kit has everything the garden center needs to promote workshops, register students, track pre-paid attendees, create name badges and customizable refreshment table signs (great idea!) and—this might be the most valuable part of the kit—gather email leads from attendees interested in future workshops. In other words, this isn't just a one-off sign for a workshop. This kit is a problem-solver and task finisher—finishing tasks before you even put them on your to-do list.

Once you purchase the kit, you can customize the templates with Corjl (which is included with the purchase) or Canva (even I can do Canva basics). And these are pre-populated templates—the designs are already in there and you can easily customize with your own details (again, even I can do it!).

"But Ellen, I need signs for other types of holiday workshops." Liz will have you covered for other types of workshops such as porch pots. In fact, Liz is taking suggestions for types of holiday workshops to include in the next set of introductions. Drop her an email [HERE](#) with your ideas. And find out more about the holiday wreath-making signage kits [HERE](#).

One last thing, and I know this is last minute. Liz is having a giveaway of five fall-themed business hours sign templates and other assets to new subscribers of her email list. Head over to [Stylish Sign Shop](#) to sign up before October 10.

A Rave for Valley View

Every few months I email back and forth with Jordan Williams, PR and communications manager

for Star Roses & Plants, to update her on the Poppin' Passion passion fruit plant she hooked me up with last year. It's vining and blooming like gangbusters, by the way, and I highly recommend keeping one around as a pampered pet plant because the blooms are so fascinating.

Anyway, Jordan wanted to tell me that she had had a wonderful experience at a new-to-her garden center and she wanted to rave about it. I'll tell you why I wanted to include this here after her comments:

"This weekend I visited a new garden center and wanted to shout it out! [Valley View Farms](#) in Maryland. I picked up some fall plants for my patio and a cart full of pumpkins. You've recently been mentioning the importance of garden centers offering events, displays and activities that are interactive for kids. I just thought they did a great job! They had a simple maze made out of hay bales, a photo display, and also, I watched tons of kids wanting to pick out their own small pumpkins. It made me think about how offering small plants like 4-inch liners displayed at kids' height during other seasons could be a great way to replicate this all year."

I wanted to share Jordan's words for two reasons. First, I really like that idea about displaying small plants—could be touchable houseplants or fragrant herbs or colorful annuals—in a way that gets kids to interact with them. In fall, pumpkins are durable and will weather some abuse by kids sorting through them. But for other times of the year maybe there's a special day where kids come in to touch and feel and pick out 4-inchers of the plants that appeal to them—and parents could bring it to the register to exchange for a larger plant. Something to think through.

Second, Jordan's words are a reminder that all the hard work you do to run events, incorporate family activities and otherwise make your garden center a fun place to be results in *impressing your customers*. You might read a review online or see some smiling kids or hear a customer say, "thank you!" as they leave. But you are impacting so many more people than you realize. Hear a single "thank you!" and multiply it tenfold. Know that you are doing great good work and people appreciate it.

Jordan regrets that she didn't take photos (she was likely distracted by living in the fun of the moment), but says there are great photos of Valley View's offerings on their [Facebook page](#). Here's a screenshot of some of them—and how cute is that straw bale maze?!



Hey, if you're in an allied business and want to shout out your fun experiences at a new-to-you garden center, I'm all ears. Drop me a line about your visit [HERE](#).

Proof of Soil

Just like that, we are already on Trend #5 of seven from Garden Media Group's [2027 Garden Trends Report](#). And it's one that I wanted to present to you while most of us still have some not-yet-frozen soil.

"Proof of Soil" represents the growing awareness—not just among soil scientists but also the average person—that the health of what's beneath our feet is critical to the health of what grows above it. This goes beyond the term "Certified Organic" to "Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC)" and encompasses the whole system to include soil health as well as animal welfare and worker fairness.

ROC is a farm-level certification, but interestingly it does not cover potting mixes, soil amendments, seeds and so forth that are sold in a garden center. As GMG points out, the consumer who is building their identity around ROC food (as many do around Certified Organic) has no equivalent standard for their own garden.

The ROC consumer is not your Baby Boomer hippie equivalent. They are:

- Millennials and Gen Xers
- Household incomes of \$100K+
- Already fluent in regenerative language from the food aisle
- They read labels, check supply chains, and notice if messaging is hollow



And they are willing to pay extra for the following:

- Verifiable, traceable ingredients, compost, worm castings, mycorrhizal inoculants, biochar
- Packaging with a supply chain story
- Education, workshops, memberships, soil science information
- Certification and credibility that holds up to scrutiny
- Proof that what they are using is helping to make things better.

What does this look like for your garden center? Here are a few ways you can "own" the regenerative soil story at retail:

- Reframe your product stories around soil. Build the story of your entire product line around

the ROC consumer's mantra, "Feed the soil, not the plant."

- Build a layer of education into your products *before* the purchase.
- Be able to verify to customers that these products are indeed regenerative.
- Build your regenerative standards before the market imposes their own. In other words, go above and beyond.

You are on the ground listening to customers and their concerns/requests for organic and/or regenerative products. What have you been asked? What are the elements of the conversation? I'm interested in hearing about it. [Email me](#) some details.

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



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