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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- Winter Storm Harper?
- How's the foliage market?
- I see the IDM-resistant imps
- Fresh from the farm
- On the tradeshow floor
- Checking in with Oglesby
- Best in Show
- A duo of interesting hardgoods
- Finally I ...
- Finally II ...

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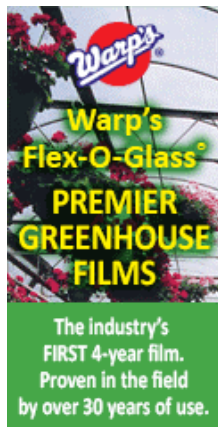
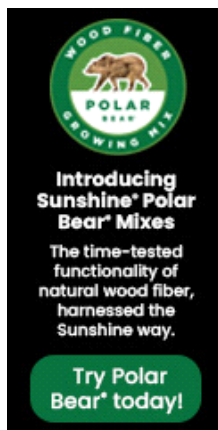
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I must have missed the memo on that one, but Winter Storm Harper is about to block my path home to Chicago from Ft. Lauderdale, meaning I'm both covering the Tropical Plant International Exhibition and checking the Weather Channel for updates to see if I can get home Saturday or if I'll have to suffer another day in the tropical wonderland that is south Florida. Rough, I know. But don't worry, I'll be punished for it eventually.

I'm down here for the week to cover the aforementioned TPIE, as well as to visit some of the local foliage growers, my annual look at that industry. I also hit Costa's Season Premier trial grounds to get my first look at the two new IDM-resistant impatiens in the landscape. That, and all the rest of my trip, is below. Enjoy! Now to check the United app ...

Sun Parasol
FiredUp Coral

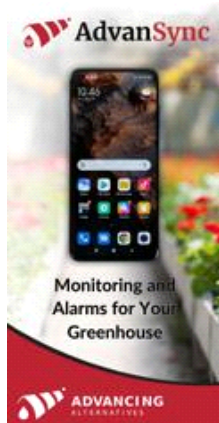
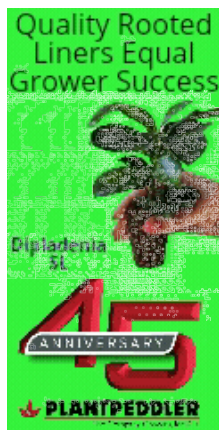


How's the tropicals market?

Strong! That's the word I seem to be getting from growers. It's credited to the strong economy and strong demand due to shortages after Hurricane Irma hit South Florida in 2017, greatly affecting supply last year. Thankfully, no hurricanes beat up the Florida industry in 2018 (except Michael, which hit the panhandle where only one major player, tissue culture producer Oglesby Plants International, was hit hard), so growers have been able to get production back on track. One large grower told me he's got 2.3 million plants on the ground—but they're all sold, thanks to that strong demand.



The biggest challenge for growers of foliage and tropicals is sourcing young plant material—it just doesn't sound like there's much of it out there because of the strong demand. I gabbed with a gathering of three growers in the aisle and that was the main topic—they all said they could sell twice as much stuff if they could just get the liners. Self-propagators are certainly at an advantage here, but not many growers do that anymore. They're dependent upon tissue culture liners of the hot new cultivars. And if you're self-propagating non-patented varieties, then you're at the mercy of the slow nature of propagation by cuttings or divisions. Bottom line: if you as a northern broker or retailer can't get the finished plants you want, it's not for lack of trying on behalf of your Florida suppliers!



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I see the IDM-resistant impatiens

I always check out Costa's Season Premier trial because it's my first chance of the year to see the new and soon-to-be-introduced annuals in the ground. This year, my main goal was looking at PanAmerican Seed's Beacon and Syngenta's Imara XDR in person, side by side. These new seed *Impatiens walleriana* both tout "high resistance" to impatiens downy mildew, the disease that has pretty much devastated the impatiens market in much of the U.S. and other world markets, including the UK, South Africa and Australia. Beacon and Imara XDR, if they perform as promised and expected, could put impatiens back on their No. 1 perch.



Beacon





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Imara XDR

Both were planted at Costa in Week 50 of last year, so as of this writing, had only five weeks in the landscape in which to get infected by the disease and either survive, struggle or die. Both were up to a good size—maybe a foot tall—and both showed no signs of infection (not that I took a loupe to them to search for spores). So it's too early to judge their long-term disease resistance, although a mere mortal impatiens might have already succumbed to the disease, maybe even back during the pack production stage.

Evaluating the two series on their visual appeal, I'd say that Beacon shows a tad more uniformity between colors, and perhaps a tad more evenness of habit, with flowers sitting nice and flat across the top of the plants. Imara XDR (by the way, the "XDR" means extra disease resistance; the upgraded Cora vinca also carries the new moniker) has the advantage of more colors, including an orange bicolor called Orange Star (below). In addition, Imara XDR will be on the market a season sooner, with what I'm told will be a global rollout starting at Spring Trials 2019. Beacon will get launched in 2019 in select high-IDM markets, with a full rollout in 2020.



But one season one way or another does not a successful variety make, especially in this case. The real test of these and any other IDM-resistant impatiens will be in the real landscape. If they perform as expected, both will help bring back the crop. If either doesn't live up to expectations, the end consumer and landscape market will let us know, and quickly. But so far, things look promising!

Here's a quick video showing both new varieties at Costa:



Rudbeckia 'Treasure Trove'
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Fresh from the farm



Over at Costa HQ, they put up a big display for their many visitors of their new and existing offerings. What I liked at first glance was their use of the farmhouse chic display cues: stacked pallets and picnic tables and slat walls (can you say shiplap?) all painted white. The idea was to create an on-trend display than any retailer could emulate on the cheap. They call it “fresh from the farm.” After all, “We are a farm!” marketing director Damarys Crawford reminded us.



On the trade show floor

Mood—great! That's what Vic Ball would have said about the attitude of attendees and exhibitors here at TPIE. I can't recall being at a show where the mood was more upbeat. Every exhibitor I spoke to commented on the busy traffic of serious customers. I haven't heard attendance numbers, but I know pre-registration was up, so I'm sure on-site registration has to be strong.

All the exhibitors seemed to have stories to illustrate how good the show traffic was or how strong sales are expected to be in 2019. Agri-Starts had about run out of catalogs by the middle of Day 2. Container Centralen (CC Racks for short) is bringing in an addition 60,000 racks to meet demand this spring, bringing their total fleet to about half a million.



Checking in with Oglesby

As mentioned above, Oglesby Plants International was hit hard by Hurricane Michael in 2018, greatly affecting their ability to supply tissue culture liners. And yet they had a big booth right by the entrance to TPIE, which was gratifying to see, as Ray Oglesby was one of the original founders of the show back in 1972. I spoke with company president Gary Hennen about what they needed to get back into full production after the hurricane.



"Time," he answered. "And people." He says many folks left the area after the storm, due to the devastation and lack of work. As they rebuild the facility, they're also working with tissue culture labs in Asia to pick up the slack in supply. It's easy with openly available varieties, Gary says, but much more complicated with proprietary genetics, since they have to give them parent stock plants and trust that those genetics remain protected.

Meanwhile, also in tissue culture liner supply, Agri-Starts is breaking ground on an 18,000 sq. ft. laboratory in Apopka that will consolidate their three aging facilities. Randy Strode showed me photos of the giant slab being poured for the lab, which is expected to open this summer. They've also added 20,000 sq. ft. of Nexus greenhouse. Randy says they've been growing at 15% a year, much of that due to strong demand for edibles like blueberries.



Best in Show

TPIE is first and foremost about plants, and I'll have plenty more to share in coming issues. But for now, I can do no better than to show you the two top award-winning introductions:

Dutch breeder Anthura won two awards for its new Anthurium called Livium: Favorite New Flowering Plant (as selected by attendees) and the Most Unusual Plant Specimen, as selected by the same panel of judges that select the best booths. With its striking striped flowers (the first for a potted anthurium), it's easy to see why. They say to expect more colors now that they've cracked the code on this pattern.



The Favorite New Foliage Plant (again, as voted for by attendees) is *Dracaena White Aspen* from Costa Farms. It offers a bold contrast between its medium green stripes and bright white stripes. They say to expect it to be a star on social media.



Booth design at TPIE is as good as it gets at a U.S. tradeshow, thanks in large part to the spectacular colors and textures of the orchids, bromeliads and foliage many companies are selling. But this year's Best In Show winner took a subtle, artistic approach to displaying their plants, to great effect.

Penang Nursery created a gallery of art out of their foliage offerings. The crowning detail, at least to me, was the various "gardening as art" quotes that lined the booth.





A duo of interesting hardgoods

Like plants, there are plenty of hardgoods I could highlight, but I'll give you two quirky ones that tickled my fancy.

The first is the "Five-Row Nursery Sprayer" by [Chemical Containers](#) of Lake Wales, Florida. It's a tall tricycle with five vertical spray booms and a quick-connect hose designed for spraying large container plants in shadehouses or open fields, fully adjustable for height and width. The idea is one worker mans your spray tank and pump in the center aisle while a second worker pushes the Five-Row Nursery Sprayer to the end of the row. You connect the sprayer's hose to the sprayer via the quick-connect, fire up your pump, and while worker #2 drags the Five-Row back to the main aisle, worker #1 reels in the hose. Repeat the process every five rows. Sure sounds more thorough, and faster, than wielding a hand sprayer in every aisle.



Builder Sid Sutton told me these types of rigs have been home-built for decades; this is the first manufactured model.

I'm sure Ellen will be featuring this one in her *buZZ!* newsletter, too, because, like me, she loved the backstory: a nurse and a physical therapist, looking for something new to do, designed this quirky "BirdPlanter." Sold only at craft festivals up until now, this was its industry debut.



Based on their job descriptions, you were expecting two women, weren't you? Shame! The nurse is Donald Murray, on the right (who's also a military veteran), and the physical therapist is Shibo

Varughese, a native of India who's now a U.S. citizen. Donald says that in their line of work, they like to bring joy to peoples' lives and they wanted to create a product "that would make people smile." BirdPlanter definitely does that! You can't help but smile when you come into their booth. The TPIE Cool Products Award judges agreed, giving BirdPlanter one of their ribbons.

The design is based on tire planters handcrafted in David's native Panama, where his mother still lives. They adapted the design to plastic, molded in vibrant tropical colors. Unit price ranges from \$21 down to \$18, depending on quantity. Check it out at www.birdplanter.com.



Finally I ...

Congratulations to Juan Corro of McCorkle Nursery. He's now a two-time winner of the CC Rack Build Contest, held Thursday afternoon in front of a large, enthusiastic crowd (the free drinks didn't hurt with the enthusiasm part). Juan was smooth as silk as he assembled a three-shelf CC rack in just 20.93 seconds for the win. And he threw down that time in round one (of three), really putting the pressure on his four opponents.



Juan, on his way to a second title (the first was in 2015).

There's serious talk of an international contest, pitting the fastest rack builders in Europe against our top builders. Now THAT will be fun!

Finally II ...

Tons more to report from South Florida, including a couple of fun nursery visits Ellen and I did the day before the show, but that will have to wait a bit, as I'm off to Germany and IPM Essen, where I'll be especially focused on labor-saving machinery. Stay tuned!



See you next time,

Chi

Chris Beytes

Editor

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