

In Memoriam: Billy Powell; plus VPD and ... Quantum Dots?



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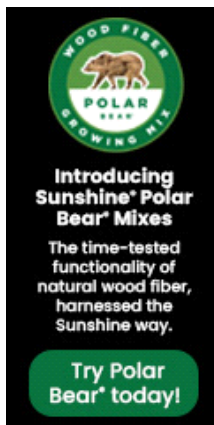
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## GrowerTalks' Acres Online

News and Commentary from GrowerTalks Magazine

### COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Environment controls webinar  
RIP Billy Powell  
Confetti for a good cause  
Suntory's new NA GM  
Everything about VPD  
Sustainability Conference Sept. 30  
Quick! Shoot a sunflower!  
GreenTech Live & Online  
PPA Fall Symposium

# NEW FOR 2026



Sun Parasol  
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### Webinar: Fine-tune Your Growing Using Environmental Controls

Next week (Thursday, September 23, at 1:00 p.m. Eastern to be precise), I've got an excellent webinar cued up on how to use your environmental controls to fine-tune your production processes.

My two guest experts—Jacob Souza, Field Application Technician, and Vinay Sharma, Project Design Lead, for Argus Controls—will show you how to identify the most problematic variables in your growing environment and the best practices to ensure you're being as efficient as possible. They'll also talk about how fine-tuning the production processes of your facility through automation can make your

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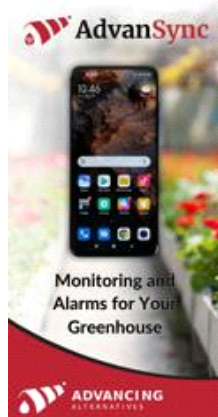
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Did I mention it's free? Yup, it is!



## In memoriam: Billy Powell

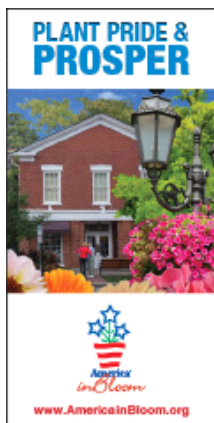
A Texas horticultural icon has passed away. Bill Powell, founder of Powell Plant Farm of Troup, Texas, died September 8 at his home in New Summerfield. He was 87.

Born in Waco in 1933, Billy grew up in LaRue, graduated from La Poyner High School and attended Henderson County College (now Trinity Valley Community College). He married Ada Ruth Haws and the couple were wed for 68 years. Early in their marriage, Billy served in the Army, where he was assigned to be a cook stationed in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He would use his cooking skills throughout his life.

In 1957, the couple started Powell Plant Farm, which consisted of just a greenhouse and a roadside stand. From that humble start, Billy became a leader in the industry, serving as president of the Texas Association of Nurserymen, frequently appearing in grower magazines, garnering many awards and recognitions, and eventually owning the largest nursery operation in Texas and second largest in the U.S. (Billy sold the business to Color Spot in 2007. It's now an Altman Specialty Plants







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location.)

Billy also loved farming and ranching. As owner and operator of 5P Farms, he became a leader in the Brahman cattle industry, winning Grand Champion at the International Brahman Show and the Houston Livestock Show. He was also a pioneer and leader in the deer-breeding business.

Billy also helped found Timberline Nursery in Hillister, Texas, for friends Sidney Allison and Walter Umphrey. Walter was a Texas attorney noted for being part of the historic lawsuit between Texas and the tobacco industry, which led to a \$15.3 billion award to the state. Walter and Sidney relied heavily on Billy's recommendations of people, product types and automation processes to get off to a strong start. (Coincidentally, Walter passed away the day before Billy after a lengthy illness.)



## Nelson Darden on Billy

My good friend Nelson Darden, National Sales Manager for Abbott-Ipco, was a customer of Powell's back in the day, and he later went to work for them after Billy had retired. He's also a long-time friend of the Powell family who has many recollections of Billy. I asked Nelson to share some thoughts about his friend:

*"Wow! In looking at the many years, all I can see is a vision of passion for the industry. Whether you were a customer, contractor, supplier or a team member, we witnessed the same thing—a modest trailblazer. Powell Farms made an impact with everything that supported the industry (people, plants, containers, soils and automation processes). Not to mention several other projects, including the cattle business. Pride in doing something well was a common thread."*

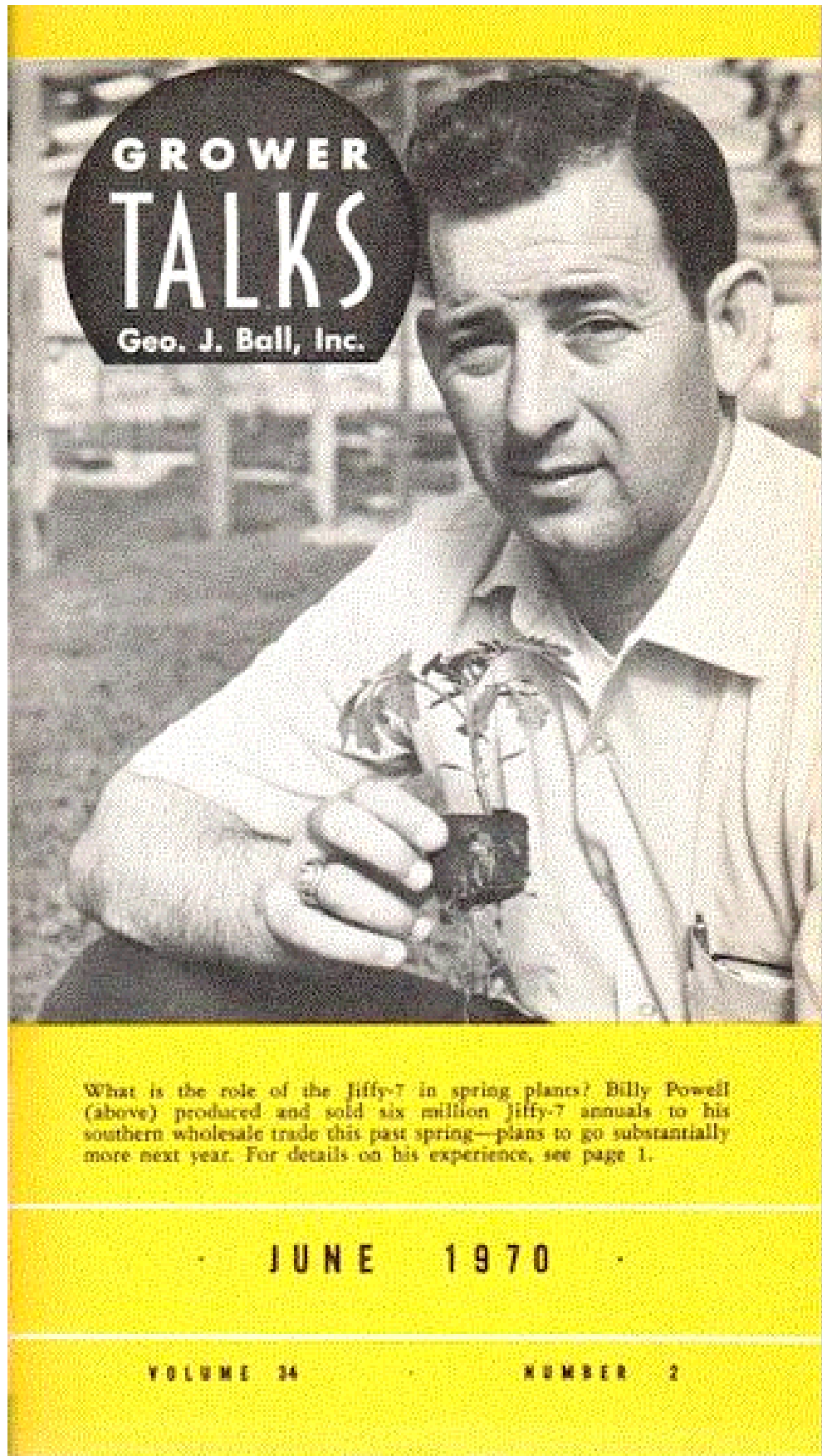
*"It wasn't just the product; it was his personal attitude beaming throughout the process to be the best. I still laugh today thinking back to when he purchased a hail gun to stop/break up hail to reduce the ruining of his beloved mum crops. Any idea to be better was adopted early; and you better hold on, as it was coming."*

*"Everyone knew they were a part of something special, and no matter what part, you were valued. Mr. Powell wanted all to share in this industry by supporting ideas to keep it going. This was exemplified through his relationship with Timberline Nursery. Billy only wanted others to share in his passion and love of the business. What a trailblazer. The impact of Billy Powell will live on, for sure."*



## Billy in GrowerTalks

I'm not sure how many times Billy may have appeared in *GrowerTalks*, but we do know Vic Ball put him on the cover of our June 1970 issue for a detailed 10-page story titled "Six Million Jiffy-7s at Powell Plant Farm" (back then, Ball Seed was the exclusive Jiffy-Pot representative for America).



What is the role of the Jiffy-7 in spring plants? Billy Powell (above) produced and sold six million Jiffy-7 annuals to his southern wholesale trade this past spring—plans to go substantially more next year. For details on his experience, see page 1.

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The business was 13 years old and already up to 170,000 sq. ft., with multiple innovations that impressed Vic greatly, from the use of the new compressed Jiffy-7 peat pots, to their transplanting room, to their loading room, which featured the same sort of "supermarket"-style pulling and packing used in the most modern "lean" greenhouses.



## Six Million Jiffy-7s at **POWELL PLANT FARM**

*Vic Bell*

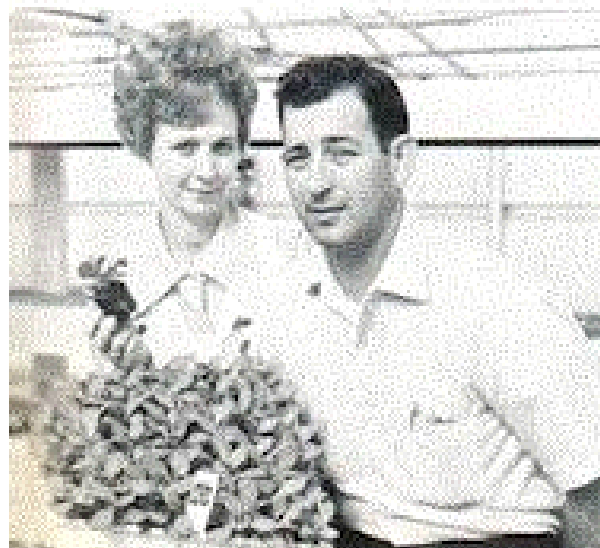
Here is an innovator among bedding plant producers!

The grower: Billy Powell of Powell Plant Farm, Troup (near Tyler), Texas. Billy innovates in many things about the management of his 170,000 square feet of greenhouses. Of this, more later. But the most remarkable fact about Powell Plant Farm, Inc. is that Billy took a look at Jiffy-7 bedding plants on a test basis last year, thought it over, decided to go Jiffy-7 in '70.

He did—and in typical Texas style, has just sold a bit over 6 million Jiffy-7 annuals to his southern wholesale trade! Furthermore, he reports the season was a complete success—and is already (mid-April) laying plans for a substantial expansion in the Jiffy-7 annual crop for '71.

### **The Operation**

A good starting place is a general look at what goes on here. It's a large-scale, all-wholesale, mainly bedding-plant operation, aimed at the southern market. Main outlets are food chains, variety stores, garden centers, some discount houses. Sales are mainly by phone, but Billy runs six trucks over his selling area; several of which, by the way, are fairly small—half-ton or less. Quality of growing here would have to be called very good—throughout.



Biggest single item in the Powell operation is petunias—and here's a flat of, we thought, well-grown plants. There are 65 Jiffy-7 plants in each flat, wholesale price 7¢, or \$4.41 for the flat. Certainly a lot more interesting return than the \$2.50 to \$2.75 for a flat of packs. In the photo, Billy Powell and his wife, Ruth.



Exclaimed Vic in his opening sentence (and what Nelson said above 51 years later, "Here is an innovator among bedding plant producers!"



## Confetti for a good cause

Dümmen Orange will honor the memory of the late long-time broker representative Matt Willoughby (who passed away unexpectedly earlier this year) by offering a special calibrachoa combination specifically chosen by his wife, Jennifer, and their three children, Samuel, Mason and Connor. Matt was a well-known and highly respected plantsman who worked for Vaughan's Horticulture and Henry F. Michell Company prior to that.



The new Confetti Garden Bloomtastic Summer Solstice mix will feature three colors of Bloomtastic calibrachoa: Rose Quartz, Yellow and Pink Flare. These three Bloomtastic calibrachoa varieties are the most heat-tolerant calibrachoa on the market today and were a favorite of the well-known southern plantsman.



A portion of the proceeds from the sale of each Confetti Garden Bloomtastic Summer Solstice combination will go into a college fund set up for Matt's children.

Please contact your preferred broker representative for additional details on how to add the Confetti Garden Bloomtastic Summer Solstice combo to your lineup of gardening products.



## Suntory Flowers names GM For North America

I've long called T. Jay Higgins "the best-dressed man in horticulture" for the dignified suits he generally wears when working his trade show booths. Looks like the wardrobe has paid off, as Suntory Flowers has named T. Jay general manager for North America.

T. Jay, a long-time business partner of Suntory, is owner of Sun-Fire Nurseries in Sarasota, Florida. Sun-Fire and Suntory have worked closely on product development, and industry promotions and exhibitions for 16 years. Sun-Fire is the top producer of Sun Parasol Mandevillas, and also produces Brindabella and Sunrosa Roses, a newer category for Suntory.

T. Jay says the new gig won't affect business at Sun-Fire.

"I am very excited for the new opportunity with Suntory, but it would not be an option without having great people at Sun-Fire," he said in the press release. "Terri Kelley, my GM, and Paul Cummiskey, head grower, and others make it possible for me to pursue other goals. I will always have an eye on the big picture at Sun-Fire, but I am really looking forward to working with the full Suntory line and continuing to grow the North American market. I have a lot to learn and will be leaning on the great team already in place as we look to strengthen current relationships and build new ones."

Masashi Matsumura, executive general manager, says hiring T. Jay as general manager is a natural progression in the marriage.

"Although Sun Parasol is his main business, T. Jay has supported all of Suntory's business as if he was on our team," Masa says.

As far as the timing, global conditions made this change necessary. "Due to the pandemic, I have not been able to come to the States for a year and a half," Masa says. "T. Jay will be the right person to lead a team that's responsive to the local market and take our business to the next level."

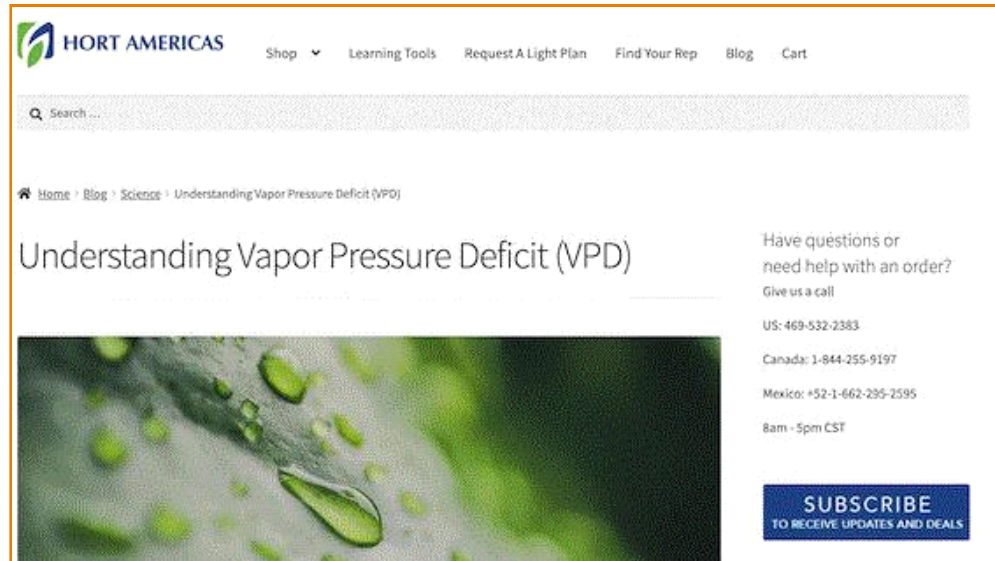
Suntory Flowers' North American team includes Delilah Onofrey, marketing director, Lorentina McKoy, sales and product representative, and Gail Pabst, marketing assistant.



## All you wanted to know about VPD

The first thing I can tell you: it stands for Vapor Pressure Deficit, it's got something to do with humidity and it's a useful tool for growers.

Beyond that? Well, I should take advantage of HortAmerica's free article and video on "Understanding Vapor Pressure Deficit" to learn more.



According to HortAmericas, vapor pressure deficit is defined as the amount of vapor that can still be stored in the air until reaching saturation point under the same temperature. This variable can be calculated as the difference between the actual vapor pressure and the saturation vapor pressure. Growers can use VPD to indicate the risk of condensation forming in the greenhouse, which can lead to fungi and bacteria growth, and even affect plant nutrient uptake.

To get the FYI on VPD, click [HERE](#).

BTW, while there, you can still (I think) register for their short course on CEA (controlled-environment agriculture) hydroponic systems (which is this weekend). And you can definitely register for the next two hydroponic short courses (strawberries and hemp).

That would make an interesting smoothie, if you grew them both.

(BTW No. 2: Chris Higgins, owner of HortAmericas, is brother of the aforementioned T. Jay Higgins.)



## Reminder: The AIPH Sustainability Conference is Sept. 30

In case you think sustainability came and went back in 2011, think again: It's alive and well, and more important than ever!

That's why the International Association of Horticultural Producers (AIPH) is organizing a virtual conference on the subject titled, "The path to sustainability for ornamental horticulture." It's slated for **September 30**, and *GrowerTalks* is proud to be a Media Partner for the event, along with sponsors GreenTech, the Floriculture Sustainability Initiative (FSI) and *FloraCulture International* magazine. Royal FloraHolland and event agency PERA are the headline sponsors.

30 September 2021, 10:00 am - 4:45 pm BST



The path to sustainability in ornamental horticulture

Introduction Speakers Panellists Programme Sustainability Survey

Speakers from around the world will evaluate what the industry is doing to become more sustainable, how we can measure progress and what the future holds. One of those speakers is our own Susannah Ball of Ball Horticultural Company! Professor Charlie Hall of Texas A&M will also be presenting, along with a list of at least 14 other experts from six countries.

Commenting on the launch of the conference, AIPH Secretary General Tim Briercliffe said, "The global ornamental horticulture industry makes such a positive contribution to the planet in so many ways, but to create a truly sustainable supply chain we need to share initiatives and work together. This conference provides the perfect platform for taking this forward."

Conference attendance will cost 20 GBP (\$27.25 US). And because it'll be recorded, you can watch the sessions at your convenience (there's that pesky time zone thing to deal with).

For more details and to register, visit [aiph.org/event/sustainability-conference-2021](https://aiph.org/event/sustainability-conference-2021).



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## Quick! Go videotape a sunflower!

You might win 250 clams! Or 100 of them, for an honorable mention. That's courtesy of the National Garden Bureau's "#YearoftheSunflower" campaign video contest, the deadline of which has been extended to September 17.





The #YearoftheSunflower video contest is designed to inspire creative videos from anyone and everyone in the horticulture industry who love sunflowers. This year's video contest is looking for industry experts to give their take on innovative ways to show off sunflowers. From a sea of sunflowers in the field, stunning retail displays, unique container combinations or showcased in the landscape, NGB wants to see how industry members are highlighting this versatile flower.

"Typically, our 'Year of' video contests are geared toward home gardeners," says Diane Blazek, executive director of NGB (and my former long-time colleague at Ball Publishing). "This year, we decided to include the horticulture industry. We've seen so much creativity and beautiful imagery from breeders, growers, landscape professionals and retailers. We wanted to give them a chance to share their passion for sunflowers."

There are six different ways to enter, including five social media platforms where you can use the hashtag #YEAROFTHE SUNFLOWER. You can also send your video via email to [info@ngb.org](mailto:info@ngb.org). Submissions should be 30 to 60 seconds long. The videos may be skits, animation, testimonials or other types of videos, as long as they feature and promote sunflowers. Visit [ngb.org/sunflower-video-contest](https://ngb.org/sunflower-video-contest) for complete details.

The top video finalists, chosen by a selection committee of National Garden Bureau members, will be eligible for a \$250 grand prize and two honorable mentions of \$100 each.

Winners will be announced on October 10.

Now, where's my video camera? And a pretty patch of sunflowers?!



## Don't forget about GreenTech Live & Online

GreenTech is a Dutch show I have not yet attended, but plan to, as it's all about greenhouse technology—perhaps even the spiritual successor to the old NTV show. The challenge is: 1) it's in Holland; and 2) travel, especially international travel, ain't so easy these days.

Luckily, for 2021, GreenTech will be a "blended" event, with both live and online components. So even if you have no intention of getting across the pond to see the trade show, you can still experience some of the experience and education from your computer.

Mark your calendar for September 28-30 and click [HERE](#) to register for access to the online virtual platform. Highlights will include hydroponics, food security and safety, and sustainability. There will be



sessions on development in the cultivation of lettuce in water; the EU's GreenDeal and vertical farming in Europe; and automation and digitalization. Plus, numerous companies will present their latest technological innovations.

Act fast! That's because online registration is FREE until September 21. After that it's 19.99 Euros.

The next shot for the fully live, physical GreenTech Amsterdam will be June 14-16, 2022. My calendar is marked!

*Rudbeckia 'Treasure Trove'*  
New to Proven Winners  
Perennials for 2025-2026!



## PPA announces fall virtual symposium

Closer to home—and revolving around plants, not tools—the [Perennial Plant Association](#) has just announced that the Canadian and U.S. Great Lakes Regional Symposia have joined forces to present a Fall Virtual Symposium on Friday, October 15, titled “Perennial Professionals at Work and Play: Canada and U.S. Great Lakes Edition.”

This symposium has been developed in partnership with Landscape Ontario, Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden, and Royal Botanic Gardens. (Reduced rates are available for members of the above!)

Leading off of the heels of the well-received Winter Virtual Symposium that focused on the same theme, join six industry-leading professionals, all located in the Canadian and U.S. Great Lakes area, as they explore popular current topics in perennial professionals' careers. Then dive in for a more personal connection when they share favorite aspects of their private home and work gardens. Attendees can participate in chats, polls and ask questions throughout the event to stay engaged. A huge bonus to this event is a top-10 perennials plant list from each presenter!



PPA believes it's unique to the green industry that most pros can work all day with plants, and then go home and play with plants, too!

For more, and to register, go to [perennialplant.org/page/GreatLakesRegional](https://perennialplant.org/page/GreatLakesRegional).

## Finally ...

Here's a story I'm just starting to follow: [UbiGro](#) film trials at Plantpeddler.



The Cresco, Iowa, young- and finished-plant producer has been conducting an informal trial of this strange new orangy “quantum-dot” wavelength-altering film in one of their small free-standing greenhouses. UbiGro is said to absorb sunlight and then shift some of the ultraviolet and blue waves over toward the red spectrum, making it more usable for the plants.

UbiGro is a product of the company [UbiQD](#), which stands for “ubiquitous quantum dots.” They’ve licenced the technology from the developers, Los Alamos National Laboratory and M.I.T. So far, the website shows trials on cannabis and tomatoes; this is the first trial on ornamentals.

“We like to try stuff,” said Plantpeddler owner Mike Gooder. So his son, John, hung some of the UbiGro film in a Quonset house in which they were growing fall crops. They were probably a third of the way through the crop cycle when they started the trial.

Six to eight weeks later, “If you walked into both Quonsets you definitely noticed a difference,” Mike says. “More natural-looking color on the kale ... like we were growing it outside. Flower size, flower color, bigger, more intense ... not huge, but noticeable. And noticeably more development of the plant.”

UbiGro sales manager Jim Gideon sent me these photos to show the initial results. UbiGro plants are on the right:





However, was it the quantum dots that did the trick? Or was it the environmental conditions the film created?

"Is it really proof-positive?" asks Mike. "It could be the fact that it was shaded a little more ... or maybe [that house] ran a little bit cooler because we had that extra shade. But, generally, it seemed to work."

He says any light-enhancing benefit makes more sense during low-light periods, not summertime, so they'll continue the UbiGro trials this winter, being a bit more methodical about it.

See you next time!



Chris Beytes

Editor

*GrowerTalks* and *Green Profit*

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