

Gloeckner Merges with AFE, Biochar Basics, Trial Gardens & More

News and commentary for the nursery & landscape market



MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2024

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Nursery & LANDSCAPE INSIDER

News and Commentary for the landscape and nursery market

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

New AFE Website
Fred C. Gloeckner Joins AFE
Biochar for Containers
Biochar with Dr. Yu
Communicating With Your Latino Workforce
Trial Gardens Across the U.S.
From the Garden: *Itea virginica*

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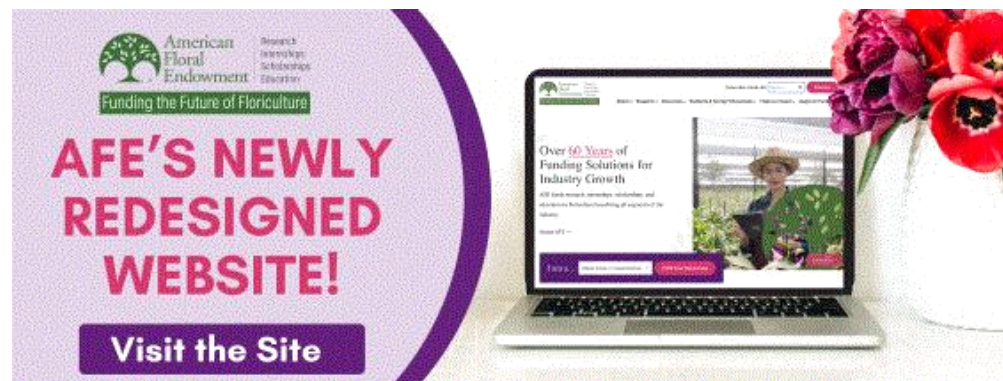
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AFE's New Website

The American Floral Endowment (AFE) has launched [their new website](#) with a fresh, modern look. The newly redesigned site features seamless navigation and enhanced program accessibility. As an academic, I find myself on the AFE website quite a bit, but I think it's an important stop for members of our industry as well.

You may not know, but AFE supports research that directly benefits growers and their website is full of helpful information that can directly support production. Research reports, webinars and other resources are available on the website, and everything is freely available.



This updated website was designed with growers in mind. Industry members can find resources and programs specific to their business segment, including tailored-specific news, research findings, opportunities and more. AFE's initiatives have grown over time, as it adapts to the horticultural industry's ever-changing needs. This website reflects that growth.

I decided to give the new website a test drive for this newsletter and was very impressed with the

ease of use. Right off the bat, there was an "I am a ..." option to direct me to profession-specific information. There was so much production-related information available, and it was easy to find and access. I would encourage you all to give it a spin. Hopefully, you'll find something useful for your business.

[Check out the website!](#)



Gloeckner Joins AFE

The Fred C. Gloeckner Foundation and AFE have joined forces, announcing a new partnership to promote a shared vision of cultivating and funding innovation, advancement and growth through research.

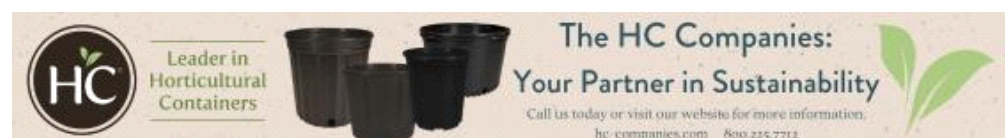


The Gloeckner Foundation was founded in 1960 by its namesake Fred C. Gloeckner to provide financial aid for research and educational projects in floriculture and allied fields. Through this partnership, AFE will provide a new home for the Gloeckner Foundation, while maintaining the current, longstanding mission.

"AFE and the Fred C. Gloeckner Foundation have been allies for many years, sharing information on industry challenges and priorities to ensure the broadest support of research funding. This close partnership and our respect for each other's work made it an easy decision to join the American Floral Endowment," said Joseph Simone, Secretary and Director of the Gloeckner Foundation.

"Both organizations have been instrumental in providing vital funding to bring innovation and growing advancements to the floriculture industry," said Debi Chedester, AFE Executive Director. "From pests and disease control to marketing and media research, we are honored to continue their legacy and expand our resources as we continue supporting and funding vital research that improves and advances our industry."

The Gloeckner Board will form a committee within AFE to carry out the ideals and mission. The transition will become final later this year as both organizations prepare for the merger.



Biochar as a Container Substrate Component

I've been hearing and seeing quite a bit of talk recently about biochar in substrates. The nursery industry continues to push for sustainability and targeting effective, low-cost options to improve fertility is one of the easiest avenues we have available.

Biochar has been shown to do just that—but what exactly is biochar? The definition put forth by the International Biochar Initiative (IBI) is a solid material obtained from the carbonization of biomass, but what does that mean? I've had discussions with my colleagues and it's important to note that as we start to use biochar material more often, we come to realize that biochar is a verb, not a noun. By that I mean any organic material can be “biocharred” and the feedstock/processing method will dictate the final product.



Dr. Ping Yu receives the Blue Ribbon Extension Award at SR-ASHS.

This can all be confusing, but luckily for us Dr. Ping Yu at the University of Georgia and Dr. Mengmeng Gu at Colorado State University have recently released “Biochar Basics,” a series of extension fact sheets with all you need to know on substrate biochar.

This four part series provides [an introduction to biochar](#), [crop response](#), [disease response](#) and [the physical properties of different biochar materials](#). With all this great information packed together, the team won the 2024 Blue Ribbon Communication Award from the Southern Region American Society of Horticulture Science this past February.

For more reading on biochar, [check out their recent paper](#).



Grow Pro Webinar: Biochar

If you liked the fact sheets listed above and want more information, you're in luck! Dr. Ping Yu and her work on biochar is being featured next week on AFE's Grow Pro Webinar Series. Make sure you tune in next Tuesday, April 23 at 1:00 p.m. Eastern. In this webinar, Ping will share all she knows about developing and using biochar in your substrates.

Be sure to [REGISTER HERE](#).



Learn to Communicate Successfully With Your Latino

Workforce

Claudio Carlos Pasian, Associate Professor, Emeritus at the Ohio State University, is teaching a new grower-focused online training course to assist with effective communications on farms. As a Latino horticulturist, Claudio said he's personally experienced cultural differences and observed misunderstandings between Latino and non-Latino workforce. He developed this course to bridge that gap and ensure everyone is on the same page.

The course is a new edition to the University of Florida Greenhouse Training Online course series. This will run from October 14 through November 8, and is designed for those already working in horticulture. The course will come with two lessons each week, which are accessible on your schedule, supporting independent study, along with interactive discussions. While it's important to remember there's no "silver bullet" solution, this course can help turn challenges into positive experiences.

[VISIT the Greenhouse Online Training Website](#) to register.



Trial Gardens Across the U.S.

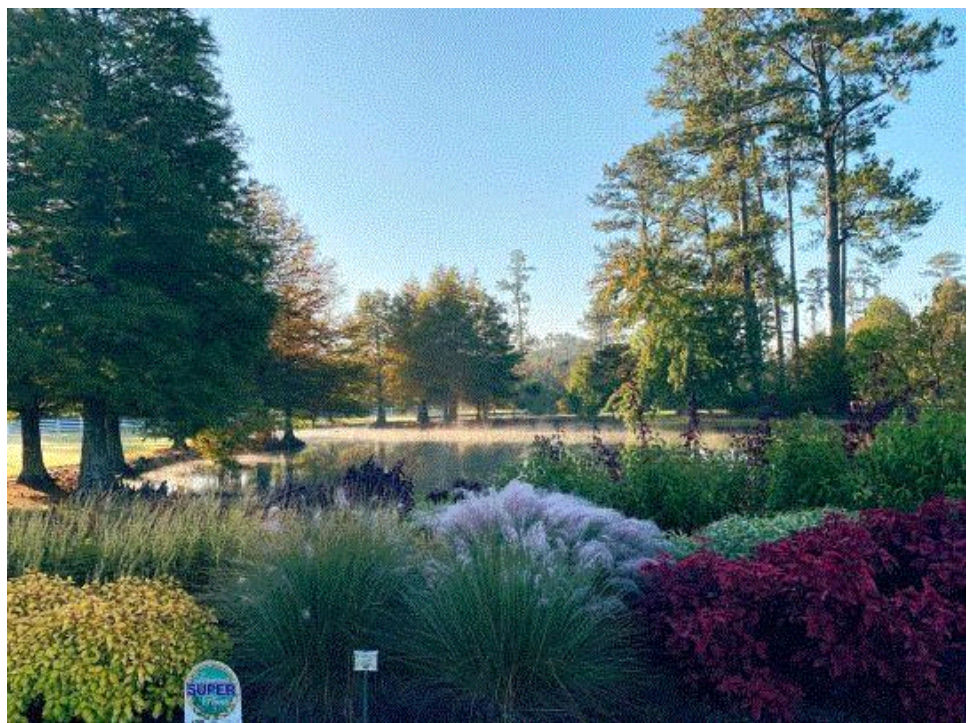


A warm summer day is a perfect time to visit the Hammond Trial Gardens.

One of the many hats I wear is the Director of the Hammond Trial Gardens. Like many trial gardens across the country, we evaluate a wide range of plant material for use in the landscape. However, there's so much more.

We evaluate the “produce-ability” of the plants, a measure specifically needed for many native plants that are starting to hit the market. Gardens like ours pinpoint what will do well in the area and also promote plants to our landscapers, growers, architects and anyone interested in their yards. We have year-round visitors with seasonal highlights, new material, tried-and-true taxa, and everything in between. We try to ensure that our gardens are a fun experience and inspirational to all our visitors, while providing critical data for the industry and plant breeders/branding firms.

One fun comment I often hear from visitors is they kindly let me know there are some dead plants in a specific bed. As a trial garden, this is exciting, as we can clearly see what will thrive and what might not. Unlike a botanical garden or an arboretum, dead plants are very valuable and can save quite a bit of money, time and effort in the long run.



Trial gardens offer some of the most diverse plantings you can find.

That is why I was excited to see a session all about trial gardens in the Cultivate'24 lineup. On Sunday, July 14 from 9:30 – 10:30 a.m., a panel of growers and trials managers from across the U.S. will share insights on the most successful varieties, as well as shed light on some of the nuances of trial gardens. The value of the trials will be on full display. The session will have a discussion with actionable strategies to elevate production practices, but most of all you'll learn more about the benefits of trials and how you can interact/support the trials in your area.



There's always something to see at a Trial Garden near you!

If you're coming to Cultivate, make sure you [check this session out!](#)



From the Garden: Itea

Well, I couldn't talk about trial gardens without revisiting our "From the Garden" series, where Dr. Damon Abdi and I share some of our favorite plants from the gardens. With spring in full effect here in Southern Louisiana, I thought I would show off one of our favorites: a native shrub that can handle the hot, moist environments of the Louisiana swamps, but is also at home across the Southeastern U.S. into northern Appalachia, with native populations into Pennsylvania and New

Jersey. That's right—were talking about Virginia Sweetspire or *Itea virginica*.



The weeping flowers of Virginia Willow are a delight every spring.

Also known as Virginia Willow (*Itea virginica*), it's a popular native shrub that adds some excitement to the garden in late spring through early summer. With profuse flowers borne on gracefully arching racemes, Virginia Willow provides a pleasant, subtle fragrance to supplement the soft white flowers observed as early as April.

This deciduous to semi-evergreen shrub is native to a wide range in the U.S., particularly concentrated in the Southeast, spanning from the mid-Atlantic down to Florida and from the Atlantic coast to Texas. The multi-stemmed form features simple, alternate leaves with medium to dark green coloration and finely serrated (quite subtly might I add) leaf margins. Besides providing plenty of interest with the spring flowers, itea adds interest to the landscape in fall as well, with leaves turning to a dark red/purple shade after summer comes to a close.



Henry's Garnet is a mainstay at the Hammond Trial Gardens.

Virginia Willow may be recognized by several other common names (simply as its genus *Itea*, as well as Virginia Sweetspire), with several cultivars well regarded in the landscape. Here at Hammond, the cultivar Henry's Garnet is an absolute gem in our gardens, coming into bloom at the start of this April. Located in our raingarden bed, this plant performs exceptionally well in rich, moist soils and is ideal for parts of the landscape that maintains a little saturation in soils. However, *itea* can also perform well in some drier sites.

This plant prefers full sun to part shade, with sites receiving more illumination, bringing forth the most illustrious of blooms for *itea*. The sprawling habit of *Itea* Henry's Garnet can create a focal point in the landscape, bookending summer with the spring flowers and brilliant fall foliage. But if desiring a more compact form, there are a range of other cultivars such as Fizzy Mizzy and Shirley's Compact.

Surely, I can't be serious about how great *itea* is, but rest assured, I am ... and don't call me Shirley.

Think big,



Jeb Fields

Editor-at-Large

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