

GROWERTALKS

Cover Story

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Trade Show Attractions

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TPIE

The Tropical Plant International Expo (TPIE) is THE place to be each January for houseplants, foliage and tropicals. Held January 18-20 in Tampa, Florida, initial registration was 6,500 excited plant people from 48 states and 44 countries in town to shop for goods and services from nearly 400 vendors. Not record attendance, but in this day and age it's not about breaking records, it's about "elevating expectations" (TPIE's theme) and we think they did just that.

We spoke with numerous exhibitors and 100% of them were smiling and enthusiastic about the crowds, the mood and the amount of business being conducted. We heard the term "cautiously optimistic" once or twice, but overall we would say the mood was a notch or two better than that. Expectations are that, if the weather breaks in our favor, there's no reason Spring 2023 can't be a very good one.

As for new products, there were plenty—including tropical plants, which is what many attendees were seeking. Here are some that caught our eye; you can find even more new products from TPIE in Ellen Wells' coverage on the *Green Profit* side and in our video tour of the show at youtube.com/growertalks.



A peperomia ...from a violet company

Nashville-based Optimara, best known for African violets, has been venturing into other crops, including houseplants, and breeder Lawrence Holtkamp developed this unusual variety of *Peperomia polybotrya* (variegated raindrop peperomia) called Verdant Flame. The raindrop-shaped leaf features a flame-shaped variegation. It grows to 12- to 18-in. tall. optimara.com



Smiles from LiveTrends

"COVID was kind of dark" was the understated response from LiveTrends Design Group founder Bisser Georgiev when we pointed out that many of his newest LiveTrends container creations are bright, fun and happy—the perfect antidote to the gloom of the

pandemic! A good example is their "Be You" brand, which automatically includes any product that immediately makes you smile, like this "Bloom by Bloom" collection featuring "Terrazzo," "Bug Life" and "We the Peeps."

Sticculents

Created by Wander Tuinier and Pieter Koen, owners of Cacti Youngplants B.V. of the Netherlands, Sticculents are a way to add a succulent to a floral arrangement, potted plant or, well, anywhere you want to stick one. It's an unrooted succulent cutting affixed to a bamboo stick with a special plastic "Floral Fix" socket that holds the plant securely to the stick. Grown in Zimbabwe, the plants come natural or painted, in various varieties, including round echeverias, and upright haworthia and crassula. sticculents.com

ScreenPlanter

There are millions of aluminum-framed screened porches across America, all of which are crying out for more plant decorations. Enter ScreenPlanter, a window box system that attaches to the horizontal bars of any standard screened porch, using slip-on brackets. Made of rot-resistant PVC, ScreenPlanters come in 2-ft., 4-ft. and 6-ft. lengths, plus a corner model. They can be painted any color, and you can fill them with soil and plant directly in them or set pots in them. screenplanter.com



Foliage from Costa

There were 10 foliage introductions from Costa Farms this year, any of which could be an award-winner. But more importantly to buyers, if Costa shows it, it should be available in quantity.

Philodendron Golden Crocodile is an eye-catcher of an aroid that's easy to grow and a stunner as a specimen

plant.

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IPM Essen

Oliver Kuhrt, CEO of Messe Essen in Essen, Germany, the venue where IPM is held, summed up the first live IPM trade show since 2020 by saying, "The joy that IPM Essen could finally take place again could be felt in every hall and at every stand." We concur!

At this year's IPM, held January 24-27, we took every opportunity to ask about the mood.

Europe may no longer be in pandemic mode, but war, inflation and energy prices has the industry on tenterhooks, with the result being conservative decisions about greenhouse production. "Careful" is the word we heard most often. After two good years (2020 and 2021), growers had a tough 2022. Going into this season, they're being careful with their orders, their production, their planning for spring. They're growing fewer plants and growing them a bit cooler or with less hours of supplemental lighting, all to save energy.

"Careful" also sums up the attendance and exhibitor numbers: about 40,000 trade visitors from more than 100 countries to see 1,330 exhibiting companies from 46 nations—down considerably from January 2020, when attendance was about 54,000, with 1,538 exhibitors.

Here are a few new products that caught our eye as we walked the eight halls of IPM Essen.



Modiform's Internet packaging

Despite the boom in Internet plant sales, we only spotted one product catering to that market: these Plant Packs by Modiform. The Clamp Pack locks pots in place and protects foliage; the matching cartons lock the packs in place. Made from 100% cardboard waste, the packs come in five configurations, with two matching cartons. Also new from Modiform are transport trays called "Pristine" that, like Poppelmann's Baseline pots, have no carbon black and no gloss. They say they're phasing out those ingredients.

modiform.com

Poppelmann Baseline pots

In many areas, you can't put black plastic into recycling because the carbon black coloration isn't detectable by infrared sorting equipment. So, at Poppelmann, they're stopping the use of black pots in markets where that's the case and now offering "Baseline" pots, which are made from post-consumer and post-industrial recycled plastic with no added black dye. We find the gray color to be an attractive, modern alternative to black.

poppelmann.com

Mini Jack forks

An Australian grower who spotted it (and ordered one!) turned us on to the Mini Jack, a battery powered plant-spacing fork from Seed2Soil. Don't be fooled by the narrow forks in the picture; they were just for the show. The real forks are about 6-ft. wide, allowing one person to easily move and space plenty of plants. Another model coming will lift the plants more than 3-ft. high so you can put them on or off a buffer belt. Oh, the pink paint job is strictly optional.

seed2soil.de/en

Javo's industrial-style automation

Safety is the name of the game with Javo's new "Industrial Automation" production lines. Their goal: bring horticultural automation up to the safety standards of any factory or plant, complete with integrated communications between machine modules. The idea is to reduce the risk for injury when there's a malfunction or dangerous situation. These three modules include tray destacker, filler and dibbler. They're working on improving the integration and safety of their carousel pot fillers, too. javo.eu

MANTS

In Matthew's *Nursery & Landscape Insider* newsletter, he mentioned how impressive attendance was at MANTS, and sure enough, the 2023 Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show welcomed more than 11,000 attendees from January 11-13 at the Baltimore Convention Center. A sold-out trade show floor showcased more than 900 exhibiting companies in more than 1,530 booths. Attendees from 42 states and 14 foreign countries spent three days connecting with colleagues, discovering new products and seeking new plants, nursery stock, landscape and garden items, heavy- and light-duty equipment, tools, outdoor living essentials and other allied industry products.



Private Jet Arborvitae from Van Belle/Bloomin' Easy

All of the new plants offered at MANTS are a highlight of the show. For nursery production, we know that a number of these beauties will be a headache to propagate and finish due to a number of traits that just make these cultivars plain finicky. Fortunately, a new arborvitae from the Bloomin' Easy folks seems to contain all the traits of a consumer-favorite conifer combined with excellent production traits.

Thuja occidentalis Private Jet, developed by Wilfried Oltmanns and licensed by Van Vliet New Plants B.V. to Bloomin' Easy, is just such a new cultivar. Developed from parent *Thuja occidentalis* Brabant, Private Jet has a very dense canopy, yet rapid growth rate (mature height of 20 ft. with a 5- to 6-ft. spread) that makes it preferable to consumers in Zones 3 to 7. It has a wide range of uses, including screening hedges, addition of structure to a small garden, a backdrop to a perennial border or as a centerpiece in a courtyard garden.

For producers, it roots reliably at nearly a 100% success rate in four to six weeks and fills a 3-gallon can in a single season, with little disease issues to speak of. Now that's a great combination of traits for growers, too.

bloomineasyplants.com

Great Lakes Expo

This regional show held in early December at DeVos Place in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is small, but was well-attended (about 3,600 attendees with 450 exhibitors). Most of the exhibitors said traffic was relatively steady during the couple days of the show. A major draw was the educational sessions that were being offered for all three segments represented at the show: fruits, vegetables and ornamentals.



Speaking of the exhibitors, if you've never been to the Great Lakes Expos, the booths are a mixed bag of fruit (tons of apple stuff, obvs—Michigan), veggie (indoor and out) and some ornamentals suppliers. And there were A LOT of third-party labor-finding companies.

Pictured: Attendees at the Great Lakes Expo got to pet Jack Junior the rooster and a gray floppy-eared bunny named Sausage.

Across the main hall, there was a "Farm Market Area" that touted agritourism with exhibitors selling jams, jellies and other jarred edibles, sweets-making machines (donuts, cotton candy, ice cream, etc.), and even the Critter Barn petting zoo where Jen got to pet a bunny named Sausage and a rooster named Jack Junior.



Mini Sigma Irrigation Filter from HGWWT/Heartnut Grove Agricultural Solutions

Normally, Jen isn't as interested in machinery or parts of machinery as Chris and Matthew are, but when she turned down the first aisle and saw something that looks like a rocket launcher sitting on a table, she had to stop.



The Mini Sigma is a self-cleaning irrigation screen filter that can be controlled via Bluetooth from a smart device. It measures the pressure coming in and going out, and automatically cleans the filter when needed. You don't have to manually change the filter multiple times a year and it's a third of the price of sand filters. Shawn McGee from HGWWT said that the Mini Sigma isn't just for big ag—it works in greenhouses and in small outdoor production, too.

The Mini Sigma is from Amiad Water Systems, an Israel-based company, but is distributed by HGWWT (which is based in Ontario) in North America. amiad.com/products/mini-sigma-series-irr

DJI Agras T40 from Agri Spray Drones

This may be a bit much for small swaths of outdoor mum production—and definitely not for inside the greenhouse—but for you nursery growers out there, this may just be the new toy you've been looking for.

The newest and largest ag drone in the DJI Agras series is the T40, which holds a 10.5-gallon spray tank that's designed to empty in four minutes and covers 30 feet with a consistent pattern over the entire area. If you've got the growing area, the T40 covers up to 40 acres an hour. You can even use it to spread granular fertilizer (the tank holds up to 110 lbs. of granular material) or spread cover crop seeds. And the whole system is waterproof. It's definitely the biggest drone for ag/hort we've ever seen. Go to their website to see the T40 in action.

agrispraydrones.com/products/dji-agras-t40 **GT**