

GROWERTALKS

Cover Story

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Wandering the Winter Shows

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Much to See at MANTS

There were more than 900 vendors across 1,500 booths at this January's Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show (January 10-12 in Baltimore, Maryland). The show has grown tremendously during the last 10 years—the aisles had foot traffic and the booths had plenty of visitors. In fact, more than 11,200 attendees walked and talked over the course of MANTS' three days.

Green Profit columnist Bill McCurry, who attended all three days of MANTS, said that people “on both sides of the booth” were preparing for a good year—weather permitting, of course. After speaking with several attendees in the nursery and garden center side of horticulture, Bill concluded that many of them will be buying more mindfully; i.e., watching the quantity of product they're buying in.

A vendor mentioned to Bill that he would personally be helping the retailers with sell-through to alleviate the burden of spares on the benches and shelves. This “it-takes-a-team” attitude should free up the sales staff for customer service.

What's new with Monrovia

Hellebores—it seemed like every booth and breeder had some on display. Monrovia's Chief Marketing Officer Katie Tamony said the three shades of Ice 'N Roses have really taken off on social media, adding that this category as a whole is really “having a moment.”

Another Monrovia variety that could be set to “have a moment” includes the statement-making Jurassic Velociraptor Ribbon Fern that renowned plantsman Dan Hinkley found in China—a compact, evergreen clumper (Zones 7 to 9) that could fill in for ornamental grasses in shady spots.

Speaking of alternatives, with all the bad buzz around boxwood blight, Monrovia is introducing Shear Genius



Cotoneaster (Zones 7 to 9) with an upright, yet malleable, form.

Pictured: Monrovia's Ice 'N Roses line of hellebores: Rose, Rosado and Red. • Monrovia's Velociraptor Ribbon Fern. • Shear Genius Cotoneaster. Photo courtesy of Doreen Wynja. • It seemed like every booth had a hellebore offering. This gorgeous display was in the Aldershot Greenhouses booth.



New, and news, from Proven Winners

The week of MANTS we'd received a press release about Spring Meadow Nursery adding J. Berry Nursery's Hollywood Hibiscus, a new category for the nursery, to its catalog of Proven Winners ColorChoice flowering shrubs. Due to weather and shipping, the latest star of the ColorChoice Collection wasn't on display. Nonetheless, we got the details.

Pictured: Hollywood Hibiscus Rico Suave. • A few of the mangave varieties in Proven Winners' new Art & Sol Collection.

The popular line of Hollywood Hibiscus will continue to be grown at J. Berry facilities in Texas. Retailers with J. Berry Hollywood Hibiscus currently in stock will continue to sell through current inventory, and new liners of Proven Winners ColorChoice Hollywood Hibiscus will transition to the Proven Winners white containers with the distinctive diamond-shaped hang tag. This partnership between Spring Meadow and J. Berry will ensure seamless access to the Hollywood Hibiscus varieties through Spring Meadow's growers, as well as the existing network of Hollywood Hibiscus licensed growers.

There was a second piece of news about the Art & Sol collection of mangaves (Zones 8 to 9) from Walters Gardens joining the Proven Winners family. We got a good look at the collection at MANTS (and a better look at TPIE) and were impressed by the wide variety of shapes and colors. Walters is bringing its six best mangaves from their stock and into the Proven Winners family, with more set to premiere in the near future.

What sells them to customers is these mangaves (a Manfreda x Agave hybrid) don't mind a little or even a lot of water—they'll flourish whatever the conditions. For the grower, these are a longer crop much like hosta. Why bring them under the Proven Winners umbrella, we asked? To help spread the word about how awesome these plants are, was the reply from the very helpful staff at the Walters booth.

The lush & colorful from TPIE

The Tropical Plant International Expo (TPIE) is the perfect place to seek out exciting and exotic blooming and foliage plants, as well as new retail products for the trendy garden center. This year's event, once again back at its spiritual home in Fort Lauderdale, was one of the best-attended ever, said organizers, with some 7,600 in attendance. Editor-at-Large Ellen Wells covered the aforementioned retail products over on the *Green Profit* side, so we'll focus on the plants here because plants are where it's at!



Sun Parasol Bluephoria

Capturing the most attention in blooming plants at TPIE had to be Suntory's new Sun Parasol Mandevilla colors, most notably Bluephoria, with its unique lavender-blue flowers. Suntory was pushing it hard; every name badge holder featured it. But Bluephoria was just one of five SunParasol colors—the others are Mauvelous, Double Pink Blush, FiredUp Orange (with a slender, upright, non-vining habit) and Red Improved, with a deeper color and a compact, non-vining habit. Pictured are Bluephoria with FiredUp Orange. We should mention that both of these won Favorite Flowering Plant awards, as voted on by the attendees. They both also earned Garden Center Group Cool Product Awards, as did Mauvelous.

Aloe Solar Flair

Aloe is an easy sell, being it's a succulent (trendy) with healing powers (trendy), so this new variegated (trendy) version should be a winner. A sport found at Heart of Florida Greenhouses, Solar Flare offers a creamy white rosette center and deep green tips. We're assured the coloration remains stable. Soft spines and compact habit make it excellent for interiorscapes.

Philodendron hederaceum Variegata

Mega-grower Costa Farms introduced several new hanging basket plants at TPIE, including this one: a philodendron that looks like a marble queen pothos, thanks to its creamy white variegation. Known as *Philodendron hederaceum* Variegata, it's never been commercialized until now, they said.

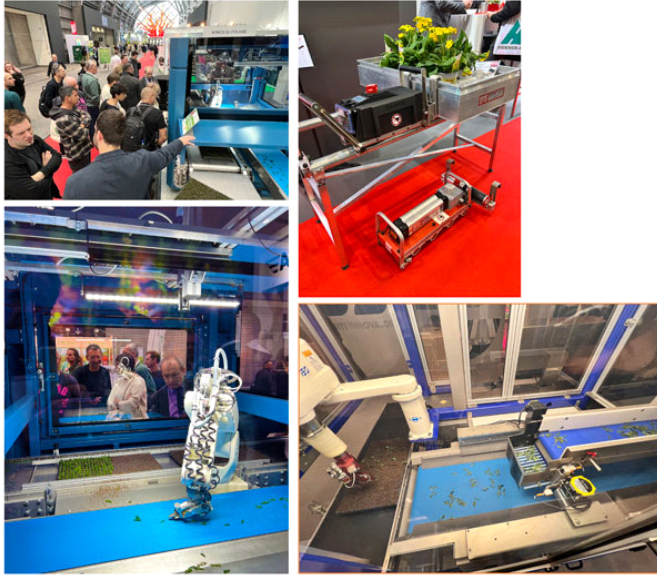
Epipremnum aureum (Pothos) Lemon Top

Another basket (or totem) variety from Costa is this pothos (aka *Epipremnum aureum*) called Lemon Top. As the name implies, you get golden yellow new growth that slowly matures to medium green. Lemon Top is easy as any other pothos cultivar, making it suited for new plant parents.

Technik at IPM

The last week of January always means the world's largest horticultural trade show, IPM Essen. IPM stands for Internationale Pflanzenmesse, or the International Trade Fair for Plants, but IPM is much more than just stuff that grows. It's also the place to find the latest tools and products to grow and sell those plants. It's a massive show—eight large halls and two ancillary areas housing 1,330 exhibitors, which attract more than 40,000 visitors.

As for conditions in the European market, we were told that the chaos has settled down, things like fuel prices and the war in Ukraine are no longer making headlines, and businesses are back to worrying about what we all worry about: spring weather and the changing demographics of our customers.



TTA Cutting Edge

Several years in the making, the TTA Cutting Edge cutting sticking robot is a competitor to the well-known ISO Cutting Planter 2500. ISO has a head start, with more than 300 machines currently in use worldwide, but TTA used that to find a way to make a better mousetrap. Did they? That'll be up to you to figure out through field-testing.

TTA offers several features that look good. First, the Yaskawa six-axis robot's head can rotate a full 360 degrees, making it easier for it to pick up cuttings. The gripper seems to do an elegant and delicate job picking up the cuttings—we never saw a miss—and it also plants them firmly yet delicately, just like a talented

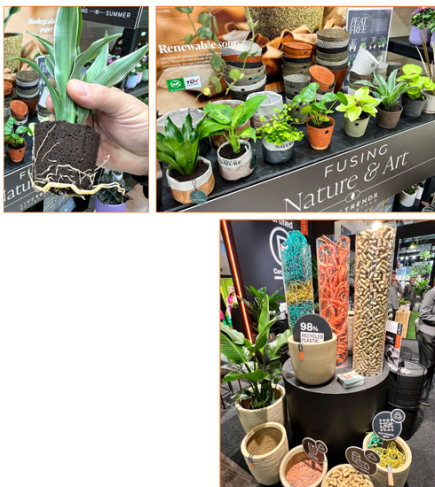
human might. A third nice feature is that input, output and cutting overflow all take place on the same side of the machine, making it easy for one operator to keep an eye on things. And a detail I wouldn't have spotted is the chain conveyor, which TTA says makes for precise positioning of the destination tray—especially crucial if sticking in small cells where every millimeter of accuracy counts.

Emma from Otte Metallbau

Otte Metallbau is a German internal transport company we haven't covered before, but this product is unique: battery-powered motors that will push rolling container benches for you, easing the load on the backs of workers. Just set them on the rail, clamp them to the container and use a small remote control to power her forwards or backwards. Emma 3.0 is the smaller of the two; she can push 20 smaller tables. Her big sister can push 20 large tables. Much simpler than motorizing your entire container system.

ISO Horti Innovators

Meanwhile, over at ISO, they're not resting on their laurels. ISO Horti Innovators continues to upgrade its Cutting Planter 2500. We've reported on software updates, which are impossible to see, but the most recent upgrade is easy to spot: a buffer belt that sits above the main belt, feeding cuttings down to it. "Singulation fingers" help separate the cuttings as they fall onto the main belt, producing 10% higher throughput, they say. and reducing the need for worker attention.



Sustainability

Greener plants and pots: I expect to see green and sustainable and compostable and biodegradable options here, and I do ... not necessarily as many as you'd expect, but they're coming. Here are a few:

LiveTrends Europe is ahead of LiveTrends USA in one way: the use of peat-free potting media, since the use of peat is being discouraged and even discontinued in some countries (the UK has a partial ban now and a complete ban by 2030). LiveTrends is using a peat-free mix for about a dozen of their Danish-grown foliage plants.

Capri Pots, a certified B Corporation, offers both indoor and outdoor container collections featuring various recycled products. The outdoor pots,

made from 98% recycled plastic, utilize scrap from their old pots, used plastic corks and old fishing nets. The indoor pots get a bit more strange, featuring “medical waste” and artificial turf, along with textile offcuts and sawdust. But, hey, the pots look fine!

Also note their orange liner. “A little nod to Holland,” they called it with a smile. Like Louboutin heels!



Euro Plant Tray

Trying to help the entire German (and possibly European industry), a group of growers, distributors and retailers has gotten together to create a returnable, reusable shuttle tray for plants. The Euro Plant Tray idea came about when the German Environment Agency called a group of suppliers to point out that some 150 million one-way trays go into landfills each year in Germany and perhaps they'd like to do something about that.

Well, when the government speaks, you act before they act for you, and that brought together a cooperative of stakeholders called Euro Plant Tray eG, an organization bent on developing a standardized solution to the problem. Interestingly, the cooperative does NOT include plastic companies or transport companies—just those who'll be using the trays. In just 18 months, they've come up with two designs in standard sizes to fit a variety of 10.5- to 13-cm pots and to fit on a CC rack. They're expected to last for 20 years or 100 rotations. They're currently negotiating production contracts, with trays for sale this summer. About six countries are involved, not just Germany.

By the way, the woman holding the tray? That's Flora Späth. Is that great or what?

One bit from Gulf States

Most of what we saw at this small-ish (over 2,800 attendees and more than 300 exhibitors, so not THAT small) regional show was seen at the other shows above or covered on the *Green Profit* side, but one thing we saw specifically for shrub growers was a brand-new boxwood that was bred by a nursery operation in Hazel Green, Alabama. Posey & Son Nursery was proudly displaying a small specimen of their new Stately Manor Boxwood along with its corresponding U.S. plant patent.

It's the first time the business bred its own plant, taking a mutated sport from their 29-year-old American Boxwood plant. They've been working on it for nine years and it's finally ready to be sold into the marketplace to other nurseries. Stately Manor is still in the testing stages to see if there's any boxwood blight resistance, but growers will be able to start ordering it this fall. **GT**

