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## Grower News

Issue number 11-3

Editor John Esser

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### Fall Greenhouse Conference

Join us at the October 12 CFGW Fall Greenhouse Conference at the Floral Plant Grower's greenhouse in Denmark, Wisconsin. Your board has put together a diversified program that addresses some of the changes we've all seen in the greenhouse industry in recent years. **Register early, help Floral Plant Growers prepare enough food and seating.**

You'll hear recently retired University of Georgia professor **Dr. Allan Armitage**. His topics "New Perennials, One man's ceiling is Another Man's Floor" and "New Annuals, What Happened to My Marigolds and Zinnias." Dr. A has written the definitive books in perennials and will share with us some of the new plants that are coming from breeders every day. From Achillea through Coreopsis, Echinacea and Tiarella, he will share his favorites and provide some insight into what is coming for growers, landscapers and gardeners next year. Oh my, the world of annuals has changed. Ten years ago, nobody ever heard of Calibrachoa or Argyranthemum, today they are are mainstays. Who would have

thought tropical like Colocasia and Acalypha would be so popular in northern climates? Join Dr A on a wild and wonderful ride through popular annuals, and where breeders seem to come out with new plants every day.

Most of us have seen a decline in our income over the past few years. Greenhouse owners I've talked to in the last month are talking about reducing production for 2012. You can increase your sales and income, and the Plantpeddler's **Mike Gooder** will tell you how. Diversify and "think outside the box."

Build your business using innovative marketing practices that attract younger consumers to your business. **Jim Rivett**, president of Arketype, worked with the late Jan Wos to build Green Bay's Mayflower Greenhouse into a "magnet" garden center attracting bus loads of customers from Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Madison and many other cities. The time has past that we can grow great plants and expect the customer to come.

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A member of the Wisconsin Green Industry Federation (WGIF).

The U.W.'s **Eileen Nelson** will invite you to participate in a free social media marketing opportunity developed by the CFGW board in conjunction with Eileen over several years. Get on the map and reach young consumers where they live. On Line.

Focus on Energy's **Jennifer Brinker** will explain their new energy saving programs. I believe most of us have benefited from their past programs and are saving fuel and electricity because of their efforts. That's money in your pockets. Also, thank Focus on Energy for their generous donation to defray some of our speaker costs for this conference.

How many of you old timers remember **Dr. Lou Berninger**. Lou came to the University of Wisconsin Horticulture Department in 1954 and retired in the 1980s. He worked extensively with Wisconsin greenhouse owners and growers in producing better plants and improved marketing and started the Fall Greenhouse Conference about 30 years ago. CFGW and WGIF board member George Radtke will induct Dr. Berninger into the Wisconsin Green Industry Hall of Fame.

Meet Wisconsin's Horticulture students. Lake Shore and Gateway Technical Colleges are bringing students on buses and Dr. Terry Ferris from the U.W. River Falls tells me that she will be attending with students. Here is a chance to meet Wisconsin's future greenhouse growers and owners. Reach out and welcome them.

I've enclosed a schedule for October 12 and registration form. **Register early so Floral Plant Growers can prepare enough food and seating.**

Editor

## **Pesticide Applicators License**

Kristin Krokowski will be offering a greenhouse Pesticide Applicators test on February 7, 2012. Contact Kristin at 262-548-7768 or [KKrokowski@waukeshacounty.gov](mailto:KKrokowski@waukeshacounty.gov).

Editor

## ***\$1,000 scholarships***

The [Garden Center Symposium](#) is again offering three \$1,000 scholarships to students in two or four year horticulture programs in Wisconsin, Illinois and the Surrounding area. Each scholarship recipient will receive a \$1,000 unrestricted scholarship along with complimentary registration for the 2012 Garden Center Symposium, scheduled for January 11-12, 2012 in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

The completed application should be mailed (electronic is acceptable) to the scholarship committee by November 15, 2011. Each scholarship applicant will be notified prior to January 1, 2012 of their Acceptance.

For further details on scholarship Requirements contact Eileen Nelson at [eonelson@gardencentersymposium.com](mailto:eonelson@gardencentersymposium.com).

The Garden Center Symposium is a group of garden centers, growers and suppliers that hold an educational Symposium each January in Waukesha, WI.

The 2012 Symposium is scheduled for January 11-12 and will feature an Outstanding line up of speakers.

Please forward this information to all appropriate personnel so that it reaches the hands of deserving students.

Eileen Nelson  
Garden Center Symposium  
[eonelson@gardencentersymposium.com](mailto:eonelson@gardencentersymposium.com)

## **New Energy publication for Greenhouses**

There are 4 new and one newly revised publications on greenhouse energy use and efficiency available from the University of Wisconsin Extension authored by Scott Sanford from the Rural Energy Program. The publications cover general energy efficiency for greenhouses, energy conserving curtain systems, heating systems, the use of biomass energy for greenhouse heating and a case study looking at the biomass heating options for two different size greenhouses and which options make economic dollars and cents. The publications can be found at <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Energy-Conservation-C29.aspx> and can be downloaded for free.

Reducing Greenhouse Energy Consumption: An Overview - A3907-01  
Greenhouse Unit Heaters: Types, Placement, and Efficiency - A3907-02  
Using Curtains to Reduce Greenhouse Heating and Cooling Costs - A3907-03  
Biomass Energy for Heating Greenhouses - A3907-04  
Biomass Heating in Greenhouses: Case Studies - A3907-05

The publications were made possible by a grant from the North Central Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education program (USDA).

Scott Sanford  
Sr. Outreach Specialist, Rural Energy Program, UW-Madison

## **California Spring Plant Trials March 25-30, 2011**

Syngenta, Gilroy California Spring Plant Trials March 2011

Each spring the world's leading greenhouse growers come together for the *California Spring Plant Trials* a.k.a. the spring 'Fashion show' of the plant world. This event is a weeklong open house for growers and plant breeders from around the world to showcase their new plants and 'superior genetics'.

German, Dutch, Japanese, Spanish and Hebrew were just some of the languages heard while visiting the different greenhouses. Most of the plants featured at the spring trials are flowering annuals available to greenhouse growers for the spring 2012 growing season. Plant breeders are extending their efforts to include flowering shrubs and herbaceous perennials but demand is still a fraction of that for summer annuals. I was fortunate enough this year to be able to attend the spring trials through a faculty development grant from my employer Gateway Technical College.

I managed to land a seat on a bus tour organized by Dr Mark Bridgen, Professor and Director of the Long Island Horticultural Research and Extension Center of Cornell University. The bus was filled with like minded 'plant geeks' from around the world. Floriculture professors from Cornell, Purdue, Penn State, Kentucky and even Taiwan National University were there. Throw in a couple international plant breeders, various floriculture suppliers, some botanic garden managers and a wholesale greenhouse grower or two and you have a very rich mix of traveling companions. We began our journey at Paul Ecke Ranch in Encinitas and over the course of five days traveled the California coast visiting some of the world's leading producers and marketers of ornamental plants.

The California coastal valleys provide the perfect climate for growing greenhouse ornamentals, with plenty of sun and warmth during the day, and cool nights. While there are lots of growers

in the area producing finished plants for local and regional sales, many greenhouses now specialize in 'plug' production. These growers only produce small plants from seed and cutting to be shipped to growers though out the U.S. for 'finishing'. This production is driven by the retail consumer's desire for new and better performing garden color every year. Professional marketing campaigns have made plant breeders the 'rock stars' of the plant world. Who will be lucky enough to breed the next 'Wave' petunia or 'Knockout' rose? Great plants in themselves are wonderful but they are also made hugely profitable with the magic touch of high power, professional marketing.

The use of television and magazine advertising, face book and social media marketing have increased the visibility of new plants to consumers, and with it, demand. Creative packaging in 'branded' pots, point of sale posters and huge colorful plant labels create dynamic displays to attract customers and drive sales. New at the spring trials this year were plant labels with *Quick Response* or QR codes which turn a smart phone into a mini barcode scanner. Customers take a picture of the QR code on the label with their smart phone and information about the plant appears on their screen. The QR code also reads the phone's ISP address which provides location information about the viewer. The customer doesn't even need to search a website for information; their hardiness zone pops up on the screen along with a local weather report and cultural information about the plant shown on the label. It even gives information on good planting companions to increase add-on sales as well as 'ratings' and comments from other gardeners. A list of local garden centers carrying that plant and brand is also provided. Some of the labels even have 'face recognition' technology so marketers can tell exactly how much time the viewer spent looking at

different parts of the label. They can use this information to customize their next marketing message to this consumer. Kinda scary but very cool, and especially important in attracting younger customers to the gardening scene.

3 different species in one plug, or 'Trixiners', were also a big trend observed at the show. Producers transplant 3 different species of rooted cuttings together in a 72 or 50 plug tray for an easy and labor saving way to produce combination planters and hanging baskets. Brand names include the *Trixiner* by Selecta, the *MIXI* by Danziger Flower Farm, Kwikombos by Syngenta and the now infamous *Confetti Garden* series by Dummen. Infamous because Dummen recently applied for a patent which could effectively prevent all the other producers from using this specific growing technique to produce a 3-in-1 plug.

Overall I saw a plenty of new petunias, geraniums, *Osteospermum* and New Guinea impatiens (on steroids!) covered in flowers the size of CDs. They were all very beautiful but I couldn't necessarily tell which ones would perform best in the heat, humidity and heavy clay of a Midwest Wisconsin summer. This is where the importance of 'trial gardens' comes in. Many of the people I traveled with were responsible for university trial gardens. They grow these new plants in locations across the country and provide ratings for plant performance in their particular area. These ratings translate into sales dollars as the rating are listed in grower and consumer catalogs. Just as consumers have come to rely on rating systems for a variety of goods, from electronics to travel, the same concept is being used to sell plants. Catalogs/websites list plant ratings and comments from university trial gardens to increase sales for new plants. I came home with lots of new information to use in improving our

trials on the Gateway campus this season. I also came away with an ever increasing list of people and places to visit!

SuperSonic New Guinea Impatien  
'Orange Ice' by Goldfish Vegetative  
now owned by Syngenta  
California Spring Plant Trials March  
2011

Ball Horticultural is one of the largest horticulture companies in the world especially with their recent acquisition of Syngenta. The Burpee vegetable brand, one of the oldest horticulture companies in the US, is also part of the Ball Network. Ball has done its homework in identifying their target consumer. This consumer is characterized as being a white woman, average age 39, educated, busy, cares about nutrition, health and the environment. In response to this customer profile, Burpee has developed vegetable varieties for 2012 with increased levels of anti oxidants and vitamins. Many of the varieties are suitable for growing in containers. The Burpee display featured a life size cutout out of this average consumer at home and followed her through her 'shopping experience' at a garden center including using her cell phone to read the QR on tags. Point of sale posters, branded pots and plant racks, posters, large, colorful tags and a giant nutrition label made for an eye catching display. The nutrition label illustrated the 500% increase in Beta-carotene in their 2012 cucumber introduction, 'Gold Standard' and the 65% more vitamin C found in their 'Sweetheart' pepper.

So after all this marketing razzle dazzle, what was my favorite new plant? I asked this question to Alan Michael, Extension Educator Floriculture, Penn State Horticulture Trial Gardens in Landisville, Pennsylvania. He gave me some very sage advice in saying he does not have any favorite plants, as a plant evaluator he likes all plants. He may prefer one plant over another but it's due to a combination of factors involving beauty and ease of culture.

The California Spring Plant Trials are a definite 'must see'. It was especially important for me as an educator to see where and how plants are grown to share this information with students. It also served to create important contacts in the floriculture industry which will provide increased opportunities for students and new ideas for the Wisconsin green industry.

Kate Field,  
Horticulture Instructor  
Gateway Technical College

## **Schedule of Events**

October 12, 2011 8:55 AM to 4:05 PM  
CFGW Fall Greenhouse Conference at  
Floral Plant Growers greenhouse in  
Denmark, WI. featuring Dr. Allan  
Armitage. Contact John Esser or a  
CFGW board member for more  
information.

November 11, 2011, 7:00 PM, CFGW  
Membership meeting at Custom Grown  
Greenhouse, Milwaukee, WI. Contact  
Paul at Custom Grown, John or a board  
member for more information