

underground plants

Underground: Existing outside the scope of mainstream mass media and culture. By Bill Calkins

Before plants make it big, they travel the country in small greenhouses and garden centers creating a loyal following. They are true performers, growing and blooming every day to please their fans. Gardeners love these plants, seeking them out each spring expecting enjoyment all summer long.

These plants may never lead the pack in terms of volume sold, but they really help position your store as cutting edge. They are your differentiators. They keep your customers excited and actually drive additional visits because nobody wants to be the last to have the new cool thing.

Every now and then, one of these hard-working varieties makes the big time and everyone celebrates but at the same time it pushes breeders around the world to find newer, more unique garden performers to send to market. Today's gardener looks for lesser-known plants at specialty garden centers — be prepared to answer questions and

recommend additional underground plants to your top customers.

This collection is just a start. Look through your product assortment and find more. Ask your staff to pick their favorites and promote them like you see in indie bookstores and record stores. A list of underground plants written on a chalk board is all it takes to be one of the cool kids. Or take it to the next level playing off underground music with creative, even grunge-style signage. There's nothing "slick" about the marketing. Save that for your big sellers and traditional garden favorites. 🌿

Bill Calkins is the Independent Garden Center business manager at Ball Horticultural Company and a big fan of anything outside of the mainstream. Find more niche tips for IGCs on Facebook, just search "Flourish."

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Chrysocephalum Silver Fox
(Ball FloraPlant)



Armeria Ballerina
(Kieft-Pro-Seeds)



Gomphrena Fireworks

The inspiration for this section, Fireworks is the ultimate "underground plant." A huge seller in seed packs, the fascinating flower blooms on this gomphrena are like nothing your customers have ever seen. The best way to sell tons of these awesome plants is to plant Fireworks in your display beds. You'll love its low-maintenance nature and amazing color impact, especially when plants start flying out the door. (PanAmerican Seed)



Hibiscus Mahogany Splendor
(PanAmerican Seed)



Chaenorhinum Arista
(Kieft-Pro-Seeds)



Pansy Frizzle Sizzle

Ruffled pansies are gaining popularity (like all unique flower forms) at independent garden centers across North America. Some of the new breeding has resulted in really interesting colors, adding a whole new dimension to your spring or summer pansy programs. (PanAmerican Seed)



Perilla Magilla Purple
(Ball FloraPlant)

Tip: Promote your "Underground Plants" with Staff Pick bench cards and concert-style signage.



Petunia Tidal Wave

Of all the Wave petunia family members, Tidal Wave is the largest and that makes it a favorite with independent garden centers. Sell Tidal Wave in 6-inch or larger pots and make sure to tell customers it grows up to 2 feet tall and 2 feet wide via bench cards and signage. (PanAmerican Seed)

Petunia Soleil

Surviving on one glass of water per week, Soleil shouldn't even be called a petunia. Sell this drought-loving plant to customers who want color for their driest garden spaces. The worse they treat Soleil, the more it will bloom. The same holds true at retail so keep it on the dry side. (Selecta)



Double Petunias

To many experienced gardeners and horticulture professionals, double petunias are considered old-school garden classics. But to new homeowners and rookie gardeners, they're just plain cool. With an interesting flower form and unique colors, double petunias (seed raised and vegetative) might be just what your customers want to bring an old-world touch to the most cutting-edge gardens. (Ball FloraPlant; PanAmerican Seed)

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