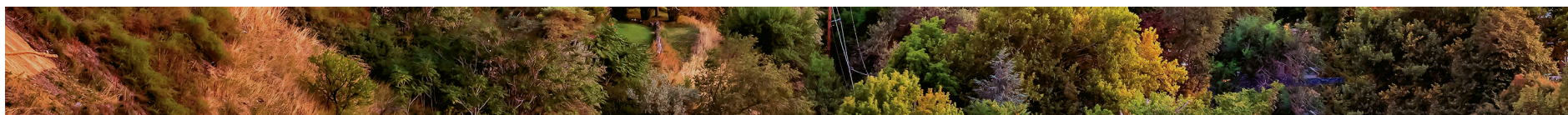




The GardenComm Annual Conference and Expo features a lineup of unforgettable events and experiences — and beautiful gardens.



By Christina Salwitz

We garden writers are known to be an enthusiastic bunch, so when we descended upon poor unsuspecting Salt Lake City recently for the GardenComm Annual Conference and Expo, they clearly knew not what they should expect: crazy plant people, crazy coffee people, and enough cameras and technology to make Canon and the Silicon Valley blush. We did not disappoint our gracious hosts.

The large gathering brings members from not just across the continent, but also from around the globe. For three impressive days, the event features a lineup of unforgettable events and experiences — and beautiful gardens. The educational program highlights included dynamic learning sessions, industry all-stars, essential networking and so much more.

For those not familiar with this wonderful group of professionals (formerly called the Garden Writers Association) here is GardenComm's mission, vision and values:

Garden Communicators International provides leadership and opportunities for education, recognition, career development and a forum for diverse interactions for professionals in the field of gardening communications.

GardenComm is a highly respected organization of professionals communicating about horticulture, agriculture, gardening, natural systems and the environment.

To foster respect and integrity for the garden communications industry and its potential members. To be the source of education and information in the garden communication industry. To advocate for responsible environmental stewardship.

Naturally, you can imagine the bountiful amounts of wacky botanical Latin jokes, zany cocktail-hour stories of how new books came to be born, eccentric garden creators, deranged animals wreaking havoc on our beloved subject matter, and a near and dear topic to many that will never be outshined — the weather. For this vast and unending subject of our writing, podcasting, video-making is rife with one-upmanship over who survived the worst and the gardens that lived to tell about it goes on until the wee hours of maybe 10 p.m. After all, we're all gardeners who get up early!

As gardeners who also earn a slightly solitary living at the desk, we're extraordinarily eager to meet other humans outside of our native habitats, where we can talk shop about our next hot topic. And this trip was a ripe cluster of early fall grapes bursting with great topics for us to write about, so in honor of this bounty of good material, I thought I'd give you a tiny handful of things I thought were neat new introductions that I found in a new session this year called "New Product Review."

Here are some plants and products too good to ignore, in no particular order:



'Red Hot Black Diamond' in the landscape



'Midnight Marvel'

Closeup of 'Red Hot Black Diamond'

With hands-in-the-dirt experience, GardenComm members represent the gold standard of garden communications in all media.



Here are some of the promotional items that were handed out at this year's GardenComm Conference.

1) Wild Valley Farms Organic Wool Pellets: Made in Utah and supporting American farmers, these all-natural (OMRI listed) little wool pellets end up as a single-ingredient fertilizer for your soil made from byproducts of the sheep shearing process that would otherwise get thrown away. They have no discernable odor, so they're ideal for container gardening and houseplants, but you can really use them anywhere. The perfect balance of nutrients includes 9% nitrogen, 1% phosphorus and 2% potassium, it's high in sulfur and iron, and the nature of it's slow release makes it ideal for feeding plants six months or longer. It begins breaking down and being available to the plant immediately upon being added to the soil. But equally as intriguing to me was the fact that because its wool fibers naturally retain moisture, it reduces watering by up to 25% and adds porosity because of wools natural expansion when exposed to water.

2) First Editions Iceberg Alley Sageleaf Willow, *Salix candida* 'Jefberg':

Now this is a plant introduction that I can truly sink my teeth into! In case you're not aware, #FineFoliage is kind of my thing, so this handsome silver-leaved willow does not disappoint. Soft, fuzzy and surprisingly large gray leaves will add so much tough texture to the landscape. And, it's deer and rabbit resistant! Growing to an easy to manage 3-6 feet tall by 3-6 feet wide, this moisture-loving shrub also features the cutest catkins too. Hardy in Zones 2-6.

3) Walters Gardens' Hardy Hibiscus 'Midnight Marvel' PP24079:

When I first saw this plant, I was looking for something stunning for a magazine photoshoot at my local wholesale nursery; I saw these and bought all of them! 'Midnight Marvel' has intense dark foliage with bright red flowers in summer and fall. It attracts hummingbirds and butterflies to your garden and is perfect for landscapes or planting in a container.

The other plant featured in the J Berry "booth/happy place in my universe" was the 'Red Hot Black

Diamond' Crapemyrtle *Lagerstroemia indica*. I had also chosen these for the same photoshoot as container centerpiece drama and they did not fail to bring on the intense look I was after. Growing 12 feet tall x 8 feet wide in full sun, this nearly completely black foliage features intensely red blooms up to Zone 6, but I'm in Zone 8 and they're very happy.

Lastly, I want to take a minute and highlight the people affiliated with GardenComm and how they might help you promote your garden center, your events and the things in your community that you care about.

From writing to photography, from landscape design to sales executives, GardenComm members represent all facets of the communications industry. No other organization in the industry has as much contact with the buying public as GardenComm members.

Our members provide direct communication and seasoned analysis between the green industry and the consumers who buy goods and services. With hands-in-the-dirt experience, GardenComm members represent the gold standard of garden communications in all media, including blogs, books, calendars, design, digital publishing, education illustration, layout, magazines, newsletters, newspapers, photography, print, professional speaking, radio, social media, tours, video, web, writing and much more.

Our members work with arboretums, garden centers and nurseries, garden clubs, garden programs and event planners, landscape architects and designers, landscape contractors, landscape product manufacturers and marketers, master gardeners, plant breeders and marketers, plant societies, public gardens and parks, touring companies, web and blog developers and more!

Members are experienced in crafting messages that support gardening and landscaping. They are the ones who write about new plants they trial, tools they try and share what they learn from professional



'Iceberg Alley' Sagebrook Willow

development programs, trade shows and gardens they visit. GardenComm members have an average of more than 10 years' experience in writing and also focus on these specialties:

- 16% are professional speakers
- 23% work in horticulture photography
- 78% are writers and photographers

So, the next time you're thinking about who you know that has zillions of close personal gardening friends in high places to help communicate about gardening trends, create customer-focused newsletters, create educational events, create news releases, package and promote garden tours, events, provide public relations, marketing and brand imaging or blog on your website about new plants, products, events, just ask one of us wild and crazy garden writers. Because we know a plant party when we see one — and we know where to dig up all the best words. 🌱

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