

The Winter Shows

We hit trade shows and conferences across the country in January. Here's just a taste of what we saw and learned.

By Catherine Evans and Bridget White

The first trade show season of the year may be over, but it was full of new and exciting information for the 2006-07 seasons. AmericasMart, Mid-Am and TPIE were just some of the many shows that took place this past January, and *Lawn & Garden Retailer* editors were there to see what was new. Each show offered something different to its unique audiences but had an overall feeling of spring. Here is a recap of how the shows above fared this trade show season.

AmericasMart Reveals Trends

Atlanta, Ga., in January — a madhouse of new products and people eager to purchase the latest and greatest for their stores. This year's attendee total was 92,000 with all different kinds of retailers from all over the country coming to see what AmericasMart had to offer. This year's Mart was held Jan. 10-18, 2006.

There seemed to be fewer trends this year than in the past. I talked to some garden center owners and managers at the show, and they seemed to think a lot of the trends presented were a continuation of the past few years' themes rather than totally new trends. A lot of those themes came in the Christmas category, playing off the nontraditional colors like

deep pinks, purples and blues with yellows, oranges and aquas rather than the traditional greens and reds. The nontraditional theme for Christmas has been building slowly for the past several years.

The nautical/beach theme seemed to be one of the biggest hits (perhaps the biggest) for 2006. Take the sunglasses and sandals trend that has been so hot the last few years and make the look a little more upscale. Its color palette includes a lot of light blues and aquas accented with lighthouses, shells and boats. Imagine visiting Cape Cod in the summer with its picturesque views of the ocean, walks along the beach for seashells and stops at the local lighthouse for an extended view of the water. This trend was all over the Mart in many different product categories.

While some said new product trends were a little less obvious, others said the product displays were really good. Some companies jazzed up their products (old and new) to give retailers tons of ideas on what they can do with those products at their stores. So often we hear retailers frustrated with making their displays look better, and this is definitely one way the manufacturers can help.

Overall, AmericasMart was a hit, as usual. Retailers got a lot of new ideas for their stores and were able to buy some great products along the way. It doesn't hurt that Atlanta is full of great southern hospitality, so all attendees are treated like kings and queens while at the Mart — the happier the shopper, the more money that shopper tends to spend.

The next AmericasMart dates are for the summer market, scheduled for July 11-19, 2006, and the January 2007 dates are January 9-17, 2007. For more information visit www.americasmart.com.

— Catherine Evans

Mid-Am Adds Features

A number of new show features were unveiled at the 2006 Mid-America Horticultural Trade Show (Mid-Am), which helped to attract the show's second highest registration ever with 12,728 registrants. ♦ According to Mid-Am, buyer registration at the 2006



Though there were not as many new Christmas trends this year at AmericasMart, that didn't stop retailers from buying. (Photo: AmericasMart)

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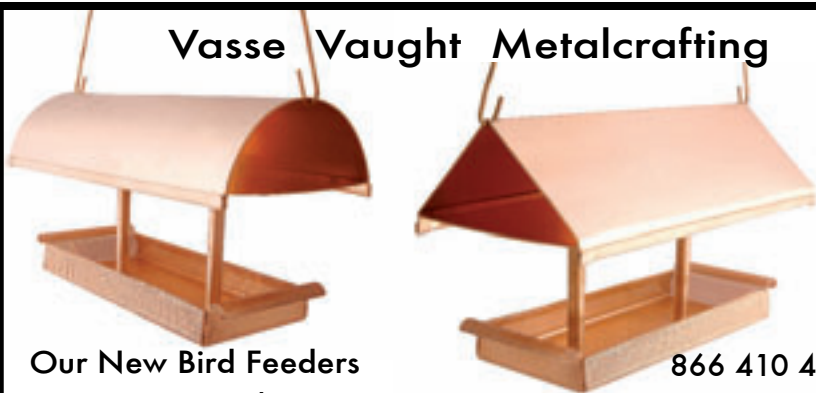
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FROM THE ROAD



Buyer registration rose 10 percent from last year at the Mid-Am. (Photo: Mid-Am)

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show jumped 10 percent over last year.

The show, held Jan. 18-20 in Chicago, Ill., featured 623 exhibitors occupying 122,700 sq.ft. of space and showcasing everything from new products to services and equipment for the green industry.

This year's Mid-Am was a little bit different than years past; the show and its exhibitions focused more on landscaping the trade show floor. Instead of simply explaining how to use their products, many companies chose to set up displays and show attendees the full impact. One company set up a large, landscaped, faux rock waterfall and pond to attract attention to its water gardening products. Another created a patio scene that showed off its patio tiles. Other neat displays used plants, statuary and garden accents. Such displays not only increased interest in the product but also showed retailers how to properly merchandise it.

In fact, some of the new displays served an additional purpose. This year, the show included two Garden Lounges featuring items donated by Mid-Am exhibitors. The lounges — one decorated as a water garden, the other as a Japanese garden — provided a relaxing spot for attendees to rest, have a snack and/or discuss business. Actually, a lot of people were utilizing the gardens for business

meetings at the show. Rarely did I see an empty chair!

Exciting product demonstrations accompanied the serene lounges and interesting product displays. Thanks to the landscaping companies, there was a lot of action during the show in the form of equipment demonstrations. One company attached a rope to the rafters high above the trade show floor to show the ease of climbing with their product; all day long a man climbed up and down, quite the visual spectacle. Another company set up a putting green for attendees to use.

Attendees were lucky this year because the Chicago weather was quite warm, though they may not have the same luck next year. Mid-Am 2007 is scheduled for Jan. 17-19, 2007, in Lakeside Center at Chicago's McCormick Place. Visit www.midam.org for details as they become available.

—Catherine Evans

TIPIE Still A Must

Our annual pilgrimage to the Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association's Tropical Plant Industry Expo (TIPIE) — in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., every January — revealed an industry much healthier and more eager than many expected given the constant hurricane abuse over the past two years.

As expected, hurricane damage and the status of the industry were



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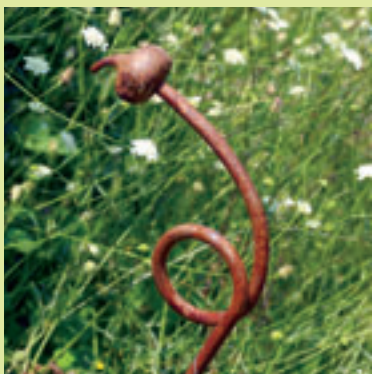
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FROM THE ROAD



Top: *Alocasia brancifolia* was one of this year's best new plant introductions. **Right:** Exotic Angel's new programs include color coordinated pots and plants.



the main topics of conversation on the show floor and at all the facilities we visited. It's hard not to talk about it when so much of the area still shows visible scars. In fact, the day we were at Costa Farms, formerly Costa Color, miles of shade cloth and poly were being hauled away while brand-new materials were being raised...all during one of their busiest times of the year.

But the news wasn't all bad. Hundreds of new products made their debut this year, and buyers from many of the main retailer outlets walked the floor. Among my favorite new plants was *Alocasia brancifolia* from Agri-Starts (www.agristarts.com). It's a quicker-growing variety with unique pinnately shaped leaves that make for an interesting, attractive plant. Also of note in the plant department, ForemostCo (www.foremostco.com) was showing what they claim to be the first seed-grown spath for 8- and 10-inch pot production. It looked like a standard spath, but seeds would certainly save on production costs!

Marketing programs seldom get me excited, but I saw two at TPIE that are real winners. Plant At Home & At Work was created by MasterTag for the long-running Plants At Work group (www.plant

satwork.com). With tags, bench tape and signage, the program focuses attention on the essential benefits of foliage; it puts a more professional image on a great concept. Maybe now growers will be more anxious to spread the message.

You also might want to check out what Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses is doing with packaging. They have upgraded the ubiquitous Exotic Angel program to include 11 colors of plant- or season-coordinated pots and added three new pot styles for the most upscale markets. This is not a hit-you-over-the-head program, but it is a great, subtle way to move foliage.

Next year's TPIE is expected to be even stronger as the foliage industry and area growers continue to recover from the hurricanes of 2004 and 2005. If you have anything to do with foliage, Ft. Lauderdale is the place to be Jan. 18-20, 2007.

— Bridget White