

Happenings in Holland

Our annual trip to Horti Fair produced some great new products and interesting industry trends that are easily applicable to the U.S. market.

By Bridget White



The International Horti Fair, by far the world's largest horticultural trade show, has taken a decidedly retail bent the past few years. In addition to the latest in production technology, you can now find several pavilions full of ideas and products aimed at retail, both florist and garden center.

Permanently housed in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, this year's Horti Fair attracted 51,227 horticulture professionals from more



Top: Floor-to-ceiling displays such as this are commonplace on the show floor at Horti Fair. **Bottom:** Instead of just showing its color range, this mum breeder added a bit of flare, showing an example of each of their approximately 100 varieties.

than 100 countries. While no statistics are kept about attendee's market segment, we noticed constant attention at booths displaying retail products. We also noticed everyone from retailers to vegetable growers to re-wholesalers all moving through 11 exhibit halls bigger than the top three U.S. trade shows combined.

Probably the most impressive part of Horti Fair every year is the sheer ingenuity in usage of plants. The Dutch, like no one else, view flowers as part of any décor, a dramatic

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FROM THE ROAD

element necessary for dressing up a space, whether that's a home or a trade show. This makes Horti Fair a beautiful show and one that everyone should visit at least once. If you didn't make it this year, we've boiled down a few of the trends and best ideas for you.

Talk On The Floor

Horti Fair news started reaching our ears months before the show even began. By late September we were hearing rumors that many of the plant breeder companies would not be exhibiting; this rumor turned out to be true. Companies that had for years occupied substantial booths — companies such as Goldsmith Seeds, Selecta Klemm (Selecta First Class in the United States) and Ball Horticultural Co. — were nowhere to be found at this year's show.

Although the flower pavilion at Horti Fair has always been heavily skewed toward cutflowers, the absence of these companies, many of which specialize in bedding plants, made it even more so (with the exception of potted orchids, which were everywhere). We have heard conflicting reports about what will happen with this segment next year. Some companies say the booth space is just too expensive to exhibit every year, and they will be exhibiting every other year. Some companies are shipping their emphasis from Horti Fair, traditionally a technology show, to IPM Essen in Essen, Germany, which is more geared toward green goods and marketing. Upon returning from IPM Essen in February, I should know more.

Probably the biggest topic of discussion at the show was the lack of innovation this year. Despite the show's theme, "The Power Of Innovation," the people we talked to on the show floor commented about seeing few really new products or ideas. There were several, as you can see below and on the next few pages, but the "wow" factor was not there like in years past when almost every booth gave you an idea or made you want to purchase something. The speculation is that this is just a natural cycle, and we can expect an abundance of new products in the next few years.



Aside from the expected breeding innovations, Lekkerkerk Plants, a gerbera breeder located near Amsterdam, showed some of the best packaging of the show. **Top:** Opaque bags with handles make great impulse buys. **Bottom:** Pots custom-designed with holiday themes, such as these for Valentine's Day, coordinate with flower color to create perfect gifts.

Products And Ideas

With more than 22 acres of display space, it can be kind of difficult to zero in on a few good products at Horti Fair, and the dazzling displays of floor-to-ceiling flowers and robotic arms certainly don't make it any easier. After the initial shock wore off, we were able to identify several retail-specific products you don't see back home.

In The Bag. In some of our rare time off the trade show floor, we visit-



Miniature poinsettias such as these are a big crop in The Netherlands. Though not in color when we visited, this example gives you an idea of what these plants will look like when finished.

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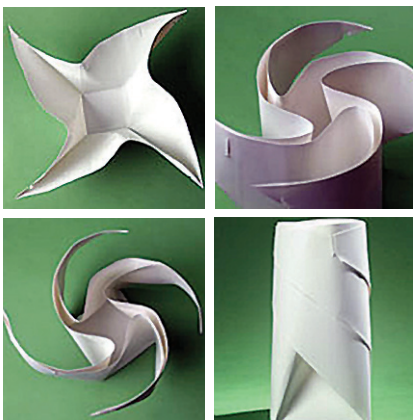
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ed a friend who breeds gerberas. He was hosting a trial to show off some of his new varieties, but what we really fell in love with was his packaging. The favorite was a premium-potted gerbera sold in an opaque bag with handles. The colorful flowers and pot showed through the bag to entice sales, and the handled bag made transport convenient — a great gift product.

The other great packaging idea shown at Lekkerkerk Plants was a holiday-themed pot. For example, red gerberas were packaged in



Kobo System Sticks turn everyday objects, coconut fiber and plastic tubing, into a way to sell more plants.



One of the neatest introductions at this year's Horti Fair, the Noming disposable vase is perfect for cash-and-carry flowers. Its folding design, shown in the bottom four photos, allows it to store flat and come together quickly.

cute, plastic pots featuring things like hearts for Valentine's Day and orange designs for fall. And knowing that owner Marien Lekkerkerk designed the pots himself (you can find his initials on every one) makes the offering

even more appealing. www.lekkerkerkplants.com.

Little Rules. Neither poinsettias nor miniature plants are new; both are garden center staples, but you don't often see mini poinsettias in the states. That's too bad because

the ones we saw while on tour with Jack Williams from Ecke Ranch were great! Plants are grown straight up in approximately 2½-inch pots with one cutting per pot. The growers love this product because the labor is low (no ▶

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pinching required), crop time is short and price is good. We also heard the retailers love them as well because the small pots take up little space, and the unusual presentation makes this holiday staple move quickly. Definitely a win-win.

Double Decker. The best

thing about this product is that it takes something ordinary — a trailing petunia or houseplant, for example — and turns it into something unique. Marketed as Koko System Sticks, the product is really no more than a plastic saucer and tube covered in coconut fiber, but

the finished product is very unusual. Basically, the tube is placed in a large container and both are filled with potting soil. A seedling is planted on top of the tube in the saucer. The plant's roots will grow down the tube and into the pot; voila, you have a double-decker plant. The manufacturer showed both top-only and top-and-bottom planted containers; each has a distinct look that definitely says upscale. www.comos.nl.

DIY Vase. Designed for the European market where people often grab a bouquet of flowers on their way home, the Noming Vase is an inexpensive, disposable alternative to wilted flowers and glass vases. The manufacturer suggests selling and/or using it as an added value to upsell customers to more expensive arrangements.

The Noming Vase is composed of a new plastic and chalk composite that is formed into a neat swirling design. You would not expect something disposable to look this sophisticated, but it does. We loved that the vase can be stored flat until use, so it takes up very little space, and that it can be printed in custom colors and designs. Imagine the potential this product could have for sales at grocery stores in the United States! www.noming.com.

Stack 'Em High. Imagine a plant cart that turns into an attractive tiered display. Now add colorful trays to hold water so you won't have to water twice a day during summer, and don't forget wheels to make the whole thing mobile. A dual-function cart just like this is the latest innovation from Italian display company Organizzazione Orlandelli.

Dubbed the Cabriolet 200 Trolley, this cart allows you to easily move and attractively display plants anywhere in the garden center. You certainly have to pay for this kind of convenience, but investing in just a few carts would probably be sufficient and well worth the cost. www.orlandelli.it.

Egg Surprise. More of a gimmick than a real money-maker, the Magic Egg drew a lot of attention nonetheless. The product is a very large seed coated to look like an egg. The whole thing is packaged in a clear plastic can that includes an individual "nest." It sounds pretty silly, but the presentation is actually well done, and the product could be a nice way to introduce children to gardening.



With an increasing number of carts being used for display, this new product from Italy might prove interesting since it doubles as a transportation vehicle and display rack.

A quick soak in water will hydrate the seed, and in a few days, a seedling will come cracking through the "shell." Unfortunately, the emerged plant is not really decorative, so the product's usefulness essentially ends with emergence. It's low-cost and certainly different. www.diskoflora.nl.

Check It Out

Next year, the International Horti Fair is undergoing a number of changes to meet the wishes expressed by exhibitors and visitors alike. The exhibition days will be from Tuesday to Friday rather than from Wednesday to Saturday. And the opening hours will be changed in order to avoid traffic jams. The new hours will be from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Friday.

The layout of the Horti Fair will also be brought more into line with the expectations of the visitors. Halls will be categorized by market instead of product category. So instead of all automation going into one hall; retail automation will be in the retail hall, production in the production hall, etc.

The next Horti Fair will be held in the Amsterdam RAI Exhibition Center from Tuesday, October 31 to Friday, November 3. For more information visit www.hortifair.com.

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