

from the road

# Happenings In Holland



*Innovations in structures covered everything from screened roof vents to new glazing materials with better light transmission. (Photo courtesy of Horti Fair)*

Our annual trip to Horti Fair uncovered some great new products and interesting industry trends we can soon expect to see in the U.S. market.

By Bridget White

**T**he International Horti Fair, by far the world's largest horticulture trade show, has taken a decidedly retail bend the past few years. You can now find several pavilions full of ideas and products aimed at retail, everything from new packaging for florists to bench systems for garden centers. But don't let this new soft side fool you, Horti Fair still features some of the latest innovations in automation and production technology for the greenhouse.

Permanently housed in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Horti Fair attracted 51,227 horticulture professionals from more than 100 countries this year. We noticed everyone from U.S. greenhouse growers to Italian flower breeders to African exporters, all mingling together in 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 element necessary for dressing up a space. This makes Horti Fair a beautiful show and one that everyone should visit at least once. If you didn't make it this past 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 shifting their emphasis from Horti Fair, traditionally a technology show, to IPM Essen in Essen, ▶



*Some of the best discoveries are made away from the trade show. At Lekkerkerk Plants, owner Marien Lekkerkerk showed us his new varieties.*



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# **GRIMES**



**“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.”**

Germany, which is more geared toward green goods and marketing.

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 page 54, 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. Surely this is just a natural cycle, and we can expect an abundance of new products in the next few years.

## 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 products worth getting excited over.

**Can We Connect?** For Horti Fair 2005, Priva B.V. took a big risk, pushing their new products off to the side while the main part of their booth imagined the systems of the future. Priva's main message was about open-system greenhouses where equipment

from different manufacturers would be better integrated. For example, the data on greenhouse climate conditions could be combined with the data from energy costs to form one report evaluating how the two interact. Even Priva admits this vision is a long way away from reality. The first step would have to be defining standard protocols that all manufacturers would use, and as much benefit as open system would give growers, it may be a step that's just too big for our industry. [www.priva.nl](http://www.priva.nl).

**On The Side.** Maybe the most exciting product at the show was a shade system that folds on the sidewall of the greenhouse. Manufactured by Netherlands-based ACL Protections, the system can use existing shading materials but requires a completely new track system. Curtains ride in gliders placed along greenhouse trusses and collect at the bottom of the sidewall in a special trough. The big advantage is obviously the gained light transmission, approximately 6-8 percent argues ACL Protections. The Invisible Screen System is marketed for use in glass houses but should be easily convertible to other coverings over appropriately designed structures. [www.acl-protections.com](http://www.acl-protections.com).



*One of the best new products at Horti Fair, the Invisible Screen System gathers shade-cloth on the side of the greenhouse.*

**Crazy For Gerbs.** In some of our rare time off the trade-show floor, we visited a friend who breeds seed gerberas. He was hosting a trial to show off some of his new varieties and let potential growers compare their performance with competitive varieties.

If what we saw is a true representation, Lekkerkerk's new Crazy Colors mix, marketed in the United States by Superfresh Marketing, could be interesting. It is a good mix of standard colors that really does seem to finish at the



*Pots custom-designed with holiday themes, such as these for Valentine's Day, coordinate with flower color to create great gifts.*

same time, and the plants are consistently compact. We also fell in love with Lekkerkerk's packaging. The favorite was a premium-potted gerbera sold in a holiday-themed pot: red gerberas packaged in attractive, plastic pots featuring designs like hearts for Valentine's Day and orange squares for fall. And knowing that owner Marien ♦

## Side Trip

After an overnight flight, *GPN* publisher Diane Pirocanac and I arrived to a dreary November rain and the smiling face of Jack Williams, Ecker Europe's technical manager. While both the rain and the smile were expected, what we learned during our greenhouse tour was a pleasant surprise.

Generally, Dutch growers are making less on poinsettias than American growers, but the Dutch are starting to identify some techniques and products that might help. With rising fuel costs, lower production temps are on everyone's mind. Both greenhouses we toured were see-your-breath cold. Surprisingly, the growers reported good results, and the crops looked good. Go figure.

Another obvious trend was mini poinsettias. The 2½-inch pots were not only a marketing gimmick they also made a good profit. The plants are grown straight up with one cutting per pot...no pinch, few chemicals, a short finish time and a good price. This is definitely worth checking out.

Look for more information about this side trip in a future issue of *GPN* when we detail a rental company that gives small- to medium-size growers access to the latest in greenhouse production automation.

— Bridget White



*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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Lekkerkerk designed the pots himself (you can find his initials on every one) makes the offering even more appealing. [www.lekkerkerkplants.com](http://www.lekkerkerkplants.com).

**All Dressed Up.** Potted-plant producers might be interested in Visser International's answer to pot covers: the Potwrap. A new, patented machine shown for the first time at Horti Fair, the Potwrap transforms a circle of paper, foil or fabric into a pot cover perfectly sized to the pot. The machine essentially twists and squeezes the paper around the pot, creating an attractive collar with the overage, and glues the cover in place. With output up to 2,500 pots per hour, the Potwrap shouldn't slow production, and according to Visser, it is a great lower-cost



*It's use in the bedding plant-dominated U.S. market might be limited, but Visser's automatic pot wrapping machine produces a great product.*

alternative to pot covers for pot sizes 2½-6 inches. [www.visserite.com](http://www.visserite.com).

**Stack 'Em High.** Imagine a plant cart that turns into an attractive tiered display. Now add colorful trays to hold water so retailers don't have to water twice a day during summer. A dual-function cart just like this is the latest innovation from Italian display company Organizzazione Orlandelli. The Cabriolet 200 Trolley allows you to easily move and attractively display plants anywhere in the garden center. You



*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.*

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](http://www.orlandelli.it).

## 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 and times will be changed as well as the floor design.

The next Horti Fair will be held in the Amsterdam RAI Exhibition Center from Tuesday, October 31 to Friday, November 3, 2006. For more information visit [www.horti-fair.com](http://www.horti-fair.com). **GPN**

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