

International Travel



Known for automation, Horti Fair 2003 featured some of the best.



Mini plants were numerous at this year's IPM.

We've done quite a bit of international traveling over the past few months; here's a little of what we saw, what others saw and what to do with it all.

By Bridget White and Carrie Burns

HORTI FAIR

Bridget White

Perhaps it's because when you're in a strange environment, you seek out familiar things. Regardless, the International Horti Fair 2003, the name with which the former NTV is now known, hosted the largest American contingent to date. Between U.S. exhibitors, international exhibitors that have U.S. branches and U.S. growers, it was clear that this "luxury" of large, mass-market growers is quickly becoming a must-attend for operations of all sizes and markets.

Of the more than 900 exhibitors, who occupied approximately 431,000 sq.ft. of floor space, approximately 50 were known names in the United States, with at least as many recognizable faces peppering the aisles, receptions and local restaurants. Still, that leaves a lot of uncharted territory, and when you think about it as untapped potential...well, let's just say a single trip to Horti Fair could put you so far ahead of competitors, they may never catch up. ▶



The IPM drew 58,144 attendees.

industry issues

As usual, there were lots and lots of “cool toys” as one U.S. grower put it. You probably already know that Dutch labor is extremely expensive, and their solution has been to automate

everything. This year’s show featured everything from mobile robots for cart transportation (think the Jetsons’ maid with a string of carts attached) to field to package cutflower automation

equipment. One of my personal favorites was a machine for applying a layer of mulch to containers for a weed barrier. (If you’re interested, the manufacturer is Visser International, and

the Belgian operation I saw it at claims 70% control with a single, after planting application.)

There were definitely some really neat products, but I found myself wondering over and over “Just how applicable would any of this be for the U.S. market? As a result, I decided to take a little different approach to my show coverage than what might be expected. Instead of a several page spread of products and machines you might never use, I’ve gathered together comments from a few of the U.S. growers that were at the show about the products they will be exploring for their own use.

“That was my 27th trip to Europe with the number one reason — to have peace of mind by being aware of our surroundings and what is happening in our world. It is easy to miss what is really going on outside when you are in an office all day, surrounded by four walls. Traveling is inspiring and assists in making decisions based on personal observation, thus giving you peace of mind. The exposure of 50,000 or 60,000 people to 1,200 booths gives new ideas in automation, plant material and networking, which can be applied upon your return home. It was not so much looking at specific products and adapting them to our operation, though we do a good deal of that, it was exposure to the trends and the energy of the international industry helping our company retain its freshness. And when it’s all over, you have peace of mind,



Automatic mulching machine.

knowing the decisions you make will be successful because you have done your homework.”

— *Terry Smith*
Smith Gardens
Bellingham, Wash.

“The first thing that comes to mind is marketing. One of my goals was to not necessarily focus on the equipment and cool toys but to see what marketing and point of sales ideas I could pick up on. I found some stakes and one vendor with on-demand tag printing like MasterTag is doing, and we’re thinking about both of those. I was looking for ideas in distribution solutions with carts, tracking, logistics. I saw a company that had a shipping system where they’re actually picking the product on rolling benches out in the field on trailers, bringing it in and then rolling the benches into a central staging area where they clean, sort and cart. So they’re bulk picking and use less labor.”

— *Jim Snyder*
Riverbend Gardens
Riner, Va.

“One of the things I saw that was really interesting is the new XY crane system from Nexus/Visser. I was able to see a video of it and would like to get over to England where they have an installation to take a look at it in operation. Working on internal transport of product is a priority for me; it’s one of our biggest problems. Almost 60 percent of our labor is used up in transport, and a device like this one could potentially save us a lot on labor. I haven’t costed it out yet, but the concept is interesting. The other thing I saw was some of the new cultivars. I was on a tour with Dummer of some Dutch poinsettia production, and I really liked some of their cultivars.”

— *Todd Johnson*
Dallas Johnson Greenhouses
Council Bluffs, Iowa

IPM

Carrie Burns

The 22nd International Plant Fair (IPM), held in Essen, Germany, drew about 1,350 exhibitors from 37

nations and 58,144 attendees, with good representation from the United States in exhibitors such as OFA, Bailey Nurseries, Southern Nursery Association, Florida Nurserymen & Growers Assoc-

iation, Maryland Department of Agriculture and more.

IPM is always a great show for us as a magazine, as well as others in the industry because it is the place to go to see upcoming trends

within the industry. Usually, the trends you see there will make it to the United States in a year or two. For everyone, the show is an inspiration. Seeing what is done overseas in terms of marketing and

industry issues

design are motivation enough to look at your business and think about improvements and changes.

While products at IPM included plants, seeds, seedlings, flowers, fertilizers, containers, greenhouse

machinery, greenhouse technology, florist supplies, etc., what stuck out most to me was "mini." Mini plants, mini pots, mini everything. I've seen the mini African violets and mini kalanchoe, but there were mini

cyclamen, mini campanula, mini argyranthemum, mini foliage, etc.

Another interesting thing to see in that part of the world is the primula. The conditions in Germany are perfect for primula production.

They looked amazing; I've never seen primulas this well grown.

MARKETING IN EUROPE

Marketing is a hot subject anywhere, especially at this trade show. In between all of the snacks and beverages served at each booth, I was actually able to look for marketing trends. One marketing trend I noticed this year was brightly colored pots and POP. In Europe, consumers purchase decorative pots and just place the grower pots inside of them. There is no potting and re-potting, so retailers and container manufacturers focus on the "look of containers," instead of functionality. Within that look, they showcase bright colors and fancy designs.

In addition to aesthetics, while I was at the trade show talking to some attendees, the topic of creativity came up frequently — creative floral arrangements, creative booth displays and, of course, creative marketing. It is definitely a different show in the look and feel when compared to any show here in the United States.

While walking the show with an industry friend, we came across some POP that could be considered controversial: a nice-looking, shape-ly woman scantily dressed next to a topiary pruned into the same shape as the woman. He enjoyed it, while I was a little wary; however, I would say it was creative. It seemed that the people behind the marketing schemes in Europe are risk takers and are willing to do a lot to get their ideas across to the consumers. I believe we can take a little from that idea in the lightest way possible. Let's take some risks; let's promote difference; let's put ourselves out there for criticism. That is the only way to succeed. **GPN**

Bridget White is editorial director and Carrie Burns is managing editor of GPN. They can be reached by phone at (847) 391-1004 and (847) 391-1019 or E-mail at bwhite@sgcmail.com and cburns@sgcmail.com.

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This publication was financed in part or totally through a grant from the OHIO Department of Agriculture, the State of OHIO, and the United States Department of Agriculture under the provisions of the Specialty Crop Grant.

