

from the road

Farwest Offers Total Package

More than just a nursery show, the Farwest Show and Seminars has widened its scope and now offers something for everyone.

By Bridget White

If you have never been there, the Farwest Show in Portland, Ore., would probably surprise you. Not only is it much larger than most people expect, it is one of the few all-industry events, catering equally to garden centers, landscapers greenhouse and nursery growers. Its four days of education, sold-out trade show and extensive tour options prove that Farwest is no longer “just” a nursery show or only for West Coast growers.

This year’s event, held Aug. 24-26, attracted approximately 14,000 attendees, making it one of the best-attended shows in the industry. Aside from a full trade show featuring approximately 1,365 booth spaces, attendees came for the 4-day education program, which for the fourth year is sponsored by GPN and sister magazine *Lawn & Garden Retailer*, with Arysta co-sponsoring this year.

Below is just a taste of what we saw and heard while attending this year’s show.

Talk On The Floor

When walking a trade show, you expect to hear about the state of the local industry: How sales went during the most recent season, what problems local growers are experiencing and who moved where.

At the Farwest Show we did get a certain amount of local scoop. For nursery growers or anyone serving distant markets, the biggest topic of discussion was gas prices and how growers can adjust to the increased cost of shipping long distances. With heavy rains and flooding through most of California’s spring, there was also a lot of talk about the weather; having pulled out a mostly flat year, Northwest growers commiserated.

But industry talk at the Farwest Show seemed a little different than at other regional shows; for once there was more discussion about the health of the overall industry than about the local market. It was actually the main topic in just about every group discussion I was a part of. People were worried about the industry and where it’s headed, how to raise prices and where to find the next generation of gardeners.



Weigela florida verweig 'My Monet' took top honors in the New Varieties Showcase. Judges evaluated submissions on presentation, possible uses, information provided, features, geographic adaptability and uniqueness. (Photo: Proven Winners ColorChoice)



This year’s Farwest Show attracted approximately 14,000 attendees; the trade show portion featured approximately 1,365 booth spaces. (Photo: Cam Sivesind)

To my knowledge, no one came up with the magic bullet we have been looking for, but a healthy discussion is the first step.

Winning Varieties

Many trade shows include a new varieties showcase, so when the Farwest Show decided to add its own showcase, organizers wanted to do something just a little different. Funded with sponsorships from GPN, *Lawn & Garden Retailer* and Arysta LifeScience, the resulting display did just that. It was more like a garden that gave usage ideas instead of a typical row-by-row varieties display.

The New Varieties Showcase featured 38 trees, shrubs, perennials, grasses and annuals in landscaped display beds. All of the showcased varieties are currently in production and will be available for sale in spring 2007. Attendees were able to admire the varieties and read about each in an informational handout. ▶



The New Varieties Showcase — sponsored by GPN, Lawn & Garden Retailer and Arysta — featured 38 trees, shrubs, perennials, grasses and annuals in landscaped display beds. (Photo: Cam Sivesind)

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But the varieties were not just displayed; a panel of judges also rated the varieties. Criteria used to evaluate submissions included presentation, possible uses, information provided, features, geographic adaptability and uniqueness.

Weigela florida Verweig 'My Monet' was awarded first place. Introduced by Proven Winners ColorChoice, the variegated weigela garnered attention in the showcase and in the booths of the Proven Winners ColorChoice Gold Key

growers where 'My Monet' was displayed. Second place was awarded to the compact euphorbia 'Blackbird Nothowlee,' an exceptionally deep-purple-leaved variety introduced by Skagit Gardens. *Ficus carica* 'Violetta', introduced in the United

States by T&L Nursery, received third place recognition.

Product Trends

With more than 850 exhibitors to visit, you cannot adequately cover the Farwest Show in one day. A shortage of time is the first problem. To make it more difficult, you certainly couldn't carry all of the promotional information you would get: There are a lot of new products, especially plant material, on display.

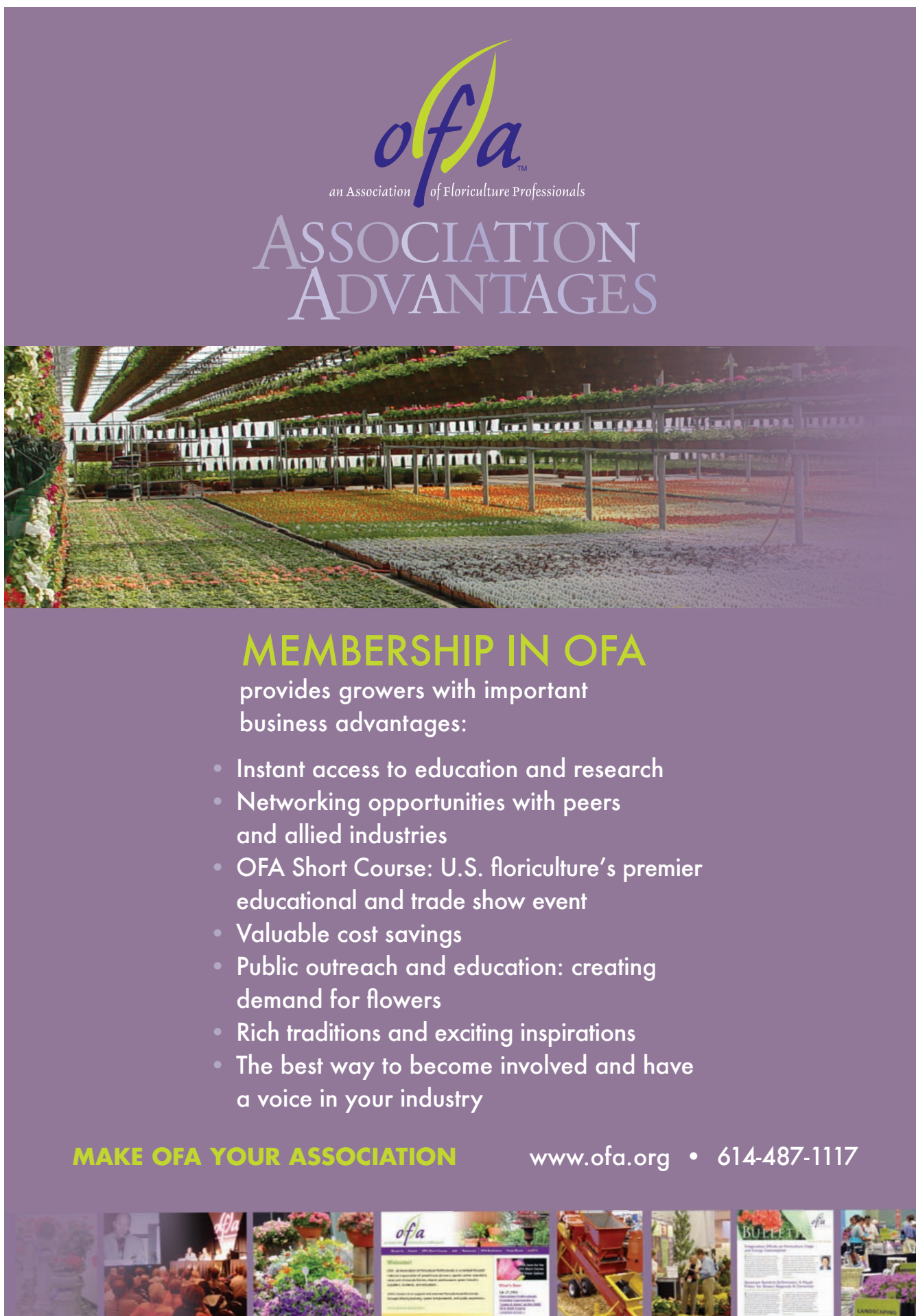
For some of us, the Farwest comes at the end of a busy summer travel season, so this show is an opportunity to review the trends we have seen all summer and solidify our expectations about products for the coming year.

One of the main trends at this year's Farwest was organic — organic plants, organic chemicals, organic packaging, etc. The organic trend has definitely moved from a specialty fringe and is becoming much more mainstream. Now manufacturers are starting to capitalize on the possibilities of organic by offering products for growers, extending organic back from the consumer through retail and into production.

On the plant side, the biggest trend continues to be injecting color and texture into unexpected places. Attendees saw booth after booth of blooming shrubs; trees with textured bark or an architectural growth habit; and tons of colored foliage on trees, shrubs and herbaceous material. Growers were even talking about the possibility of a garden with all of the visual interest coming from the texture and colored foliage of woodies...no annuals. It's safe to say the slow-moving nursery business is definitely going through a radical change right now.


If you want to take part in any of these trends, are looking for some of the best nursery stock in the country or just want to enjoy the beautiful weather in Portland, next year's Farwest Show and Seminars will take place Aug. 23-25, 2007, at the Portland Convention Center in Portland, Ore. **GPN**

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