

Pursuing the Latest Trends

It's innovate or die, or so the saying goes. I am always looking to future plant trends to keep current on my “plant game.” There's nothing more exhilarating than being on the crest of the wave on trends — I don't want to be left behind. I love seeking out both design trends and perennial trends, since my business is perennials.



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Horticulture trends, like fashion, often start in Europe. I've attended the Plantarium trade show in Boskoop, Netherlands, every year for the past five years. It's a

smaller perennial and shrub-focused show, but “small show” doesn't mean small effort. Europeans definitely go the extra mile (or should I say kilometer?) when it comes to marketing

and displaying plants. You'll often find me snapping photos for inspiration, both with novelty plants and design elements.

Two years ago, I attended IPM in Essen, Germany, for the first time with a group of NextGen business owners. If you haven't been, it's like Cultivate on steroids. You're almost certainly bound to get lost in its winding halls, but every lost turn finds you in a booth with out-of-this-world creativity. I've heard that Flower Trials (aka Week 24) is also excellent, but I've never attended myself. It's definitely on my bucket list, and I often bug industry friends to bring back trend reports.

DISCOVERING EUROPEAN TRENDS

As for plant trends, I find that there's some overlap between the continents, but it's naturally different simply because of way of life. Sure, we're pretty similar culturally to Europe, but in North America we definitely have “wide open spaces.” Europeans tend to have more limited space.

As you drive around the Netherlands and Germany you understand why. Especially in the Netherlands, there's not a ton of land that hasn't been cultivated, curated or developed.

House boats dot the rivers and canals, trying to grab more square footage in a country that is space limited and land prices exorbitant. You don't see the massive yards and houses that we're used to in the United States.

This reflects in their choice of perennial characteristics. Compact plants, perennial combos and perennial container inspiration ideas are all very popular. This is a trend that has leaked over to North America, especially in larger cities. There was an overreaction to the idea of “compact plants” and

suddenly every introduction was 12 inches tall, which does not work very well for garden design. Walters Gardens' hybridizing has been working on some taller plants that take up less space (ideal for the city garden). My favorite example is veronica 'Blue Skywalker'.

There are certainly plenty of plant introductions in the U.S., but in my opinion, the European market is even more flooded. If you're going to introduce a new variety, it really needs to stand out to catch people's eye. Is it long flowering? Does it have a unique trait or color? If you put it on display, are people going to stop and ask which plant it is? These are

questions being asked and it's definitely something to think about for introductions to the North American market.

GETTING CREATIVE

Seeing all that's out there has inspired me to step up our game when it comes to creative marketing. We brought some new ideas to our Cultivate booth in July and are already brainstorming on how to make it look unique next year.

We are also not limiting our creativity to the major trade shows. This past summer we put up a huge heuchera “living wall” that featured the Proven Winners logo. Come visit Walters Gardens next summer and see more of the cool things that we have going on.

I can't wait to attend IPM again as well as several other shows in Europe and North America. Continue to look to Walters Gardens for cool, fashionable perennials! [gpn](http://gpn.com)

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