

Trend-setting Containers

Nursery containers go high-tech and high-fashion as manufacturers respond to the needs of growers.

Ten years ago, nursery containers were the Rodney Dangerfields of the Horticulture industry; they simply didn't get any respect. In those days, a pot was a pot was a pot. But, times and technologies have changed. A major trend in the industry today is the introduction of new, technologically-improved containers. Increasingly, containers are being recognized as key greenhouse and nursery equipment that can affect the growth and health of plants, lead to cost efficiencies in plant production and distribution, and give added value to wholesale and retail sales.

“Once largely undistinguishable, containers are now being highly differentiated by technological advances in color, style, and design,” explains Eric Rosenthal, Director of Sales and Marketing for Florikan E.S.A. Corporation, manufacturer of Amerikan, LLC brand containers. “More so today, growers want containers that can increase production efficiencies and improve the marketability of a plant by setting it apart from the competition.”

Indicative of the growing demand for innovative containers is Florikan's July ground-breaking for a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Sebring, Florida. Set to open close to the new year, the new facility will be situated on a 10-acre parcel of the Palm Grove Industrial Park. Using current market and container trend insights from actual growers, Florikan has plans to implement the latest in blow-mold technology and advanced quality-control systems, as well as manufacture its pots with 100% recycled plastics.

“When we asked growers what they want, we found there is a huge demand in the market for technologically-advanced, yet competitively-priced, containers,”

says Rosenthal. “This is a combination that will be fulfilled at the new plant with the world’s best manufacturing technologies and professional engineers.”

Root-Pruning Pots Pay Dividends and Set Trends

One of the hottest new trends for growing large trees and shrubs is the use of containers that utilize automatic root pruning. The revolutionary Air-Pot, created by Scotland-based Caledonian Tree Farm, is gleaning the attention of growers in the U.S. with its perforated, three-dimensional, waffle-shaped walls. As a tree’s roots grow and reach the holes in the sides of the container, air dehydrates the exposed tips - equating to a natural pruning system. The dehydration prunes the root tips and causes vigorous root branching. The end result is the development of a dense, fibrous, and non-spiraling root system that allows trees and shrubs to establish more quickly in the landscape, with little or no transplant shock.

Alan Heinrich, Director of Production at Cherry Lake Tree Farm in Groveland, Florida, says that “Air-pruning pots are inevitably becoming the standard for the landscape nursery industry.” Cherry Lake extensively tested multiple growing systems, and quickly realized that the Air-Pot outperformed all other production methods. “We got faster growth, better establishment after transplanting, fewer culls, and a decreased mortality rate,” Heinrich explains.

The continuous air-induced root pruning results in stalwart roots that are efficient in absorbing available water and nutrients, and which are less vulnerable to temperature extremes, a factor adversely affecting roots in traditional containers. “Growers are turning to this technology trend more and more because they understand the importance of quality root systems,” says Heinrich.

In fact, the current high demand for the Air-Pot among growers has led to a new partnership between Caledonian and Florikan, whereas the latter is now the Air-Pot distributor for the Southeast.

Eddie Pots – Smaller Pots Yielding Bigger Profits

Another container trend this season is the ever-increasing demand for Eddie Pots, evidenced by high numbers of grower requests and pot sales since late winter. Created by Ed Rosenthal, President of Florikan E.S.A., together with Jake Koornneef, founder of Delray Plants in Florida, Eddie Pots provide nurseries with a way to reduce production costs without losing any wholesale or retail selling margins. The Eddie Pot is approximately 10 percent smaller than the industry's standard 1000C pot, yet it maintains the visual profile height of the 1000C. This 10 percent size reduction results in a corresponding and significant price savings to growers in soil and fertilizer usage costs. The Eddie Pot also has a narrower upper rim than the 1000C pot. The 'carry and stack' rim design allows for increased transportation efficiencies, since more plants can be loaded on a truck with greater ease of handling.

Randy Gilde of Delray Plants points to other advantages of Eddie Pots that he believes are making them such a hot item in the trade. "The slight taper to their side walls concentrates plants' roots in the ideal zone and does not allow soil wastage on the top diameter where roots do not grow. The Eddie Pot's wide base offers enhanced stability, and higher side drain holes reduce the chemical and fertilizer leaching associated with bottom-holed pots."

Cover Pots Increase Retail Sales and Profits this Year

Wholesalers and retailers see locking cover pots as a serious trend that is growing in popularity. According to the Green Industry Marketing Association's 2005 1st quarter study, more than 87% of the industry feels the increased salability of plants in decorative cover pots is an important merchandizing concept. Consumers simply seem to flock to plants that have the smart, sleek look that cover pots provide. Colored cover pots also allow retailers to easily

separate plants by size, color or price; they create attractive merchandizing displays and aid in inventory control.

The Amerikan Rim-Lock™ cover pot, a fashion-setting container, marries marketability with high-technology. These decorative cover pots are designed to slip over ubiquitous black nursery pots and allow retailers to get premium prices on cover-potted plants. Whereas first-generation cover pots were vulnerable to being switched-out by consumers at retail centers, the new patent-pending Rim-Lock™ cover pots cannot be switched by consumers. The rim system of the new containers locks tightly into place over standard 1000C pots or Eddie Pots, and they are virtually impossible to remove once slipped into place.

Beauty Inside and Out

No longer seen as simple receptacles to hold soil, nursery containers are evermore considered as products that can improve plant tenacity, increase production, and boost profit margins. The beauty may be in the technological advances that allow enhanced root development. It may be in the small tweaks that allow more containers to load onto a truck, or it may be in the eye of the retail consumer who is willing to pay a premium for an attractive pot. Regardless, the beauty is always there in a better-looking tree or foliage plant, and in a better-looking bottom line.

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