

TPIE STILL A MUST

Our annual pilgrimage to the Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association's Tropical Plant Industry Expo (TPIE) — in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., every January — revealed an industry much healthier and more eager than many expected given the constant hurricane abuse over the past two years.

As expected, hurricane damage and the status of the industry were the main topics of conversation on the show floor and at all the facilities we visited. It's hard not to talk about it when so much of the area still shows visible scars. In fact, the day we were at Costa Farms, formerly Costa Color, miles of shade cloth and poly were being hauled away while brand-new materials were being raised...all during one of their busiest times of the year.

But the news wasn't all bad. Hundreds of new products made their debut at this year's TPIE, and buyers from many of the main retailer outlets walked the floor. Among my favorite new plants was *Alocasia brancifolia* from Agri-Starts (www.agristarts.com). It's a quicker-growing variety with unique pinnately shaped leaves that make for an interesting, attractive plant. Also of note in the plant department, ForemostCo (www.foremostco.com) was showing what they claim to be the first seed-grown spath for 8- and

10-inch pot production. It looked like a standard spath, but seeds would certainly save on production costs!

Marketing programs seldom get me excited, but I saw two at TPIE that are real winners. Plant At Home & At Work was created by MasterTag for the long-running Plants At Work group (www.plantsatwork.com). With tags, bench tape and signage, the program focuses attention on the essential benefits of foliage; it puts a more professional image on a great concept. Maybe now growers will be more anxious to spread the message.

You also might want to check out what Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses in doing with packaging. They have upgraded the ubiquitous Exotic Angle program to include 11 colors of plant- or season-coordinated pots and added three new pot styles

for the most upscale markets. This is not a hit-you-over-the-head program, but it is a great, subtle way to move foliage.

Next year's TPIE is expected to be even stronger as the foliage industry and area growers continue to recover from the hurricanes of 2004 and 2005. If you have anything to do with foliage, Ft. Lauderdale is the place to be Jan. 18-20, 2007.

—Bridget White



Despite hurricanes the past few years and a down foliage market, TPIE is still one of the most important shows in the industry.