



Foliage

Foliage Forecast

After rebuilding in 2006, the foliage industry is optimistic about the future.

By Ann-Marie Conroy

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No one can predict the future. So many variables can contribute to the ups and downs of any industry. But, where the foliage industry will stand in 2007 might be best determined by looking at where 2006 has taken it. With no major hurricanes last year and fuel costs finally beginning to level out, some major changes may be on the horizon.

Buyer Dynamics

Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscapers Association executive vice president Ben Bolusky explains that a lot of the foliage industry's biggest

changes last year are still evolving, one of them being buyer dynamics.

"In dealing with the growers, FNGLA sees buyer channels narrowing," he says. "The demand for tropicals and foliage is not shrinking, yet the base of buyers appears to be. It is challenging for foliage growers to identify and find a diversity of buyers in the wholesale marketplace." Bolusky also notes that the big box stores' insistence on pay-by-scan has been a challenge for a lot of smaller growers.

Mark Poorbaugh, owner of Prolific Plants Inc. in Apopka, FL, also says he's seeing a strong demand for foliage, but like Bolusky, he has noticed smaller nurseries struggling.

"I think there's going to be a consolidation," he says. "Some of the

smaller nurseries are tending to give way to the larger nurseries in sales. I think the people who are large enough to stand through that change are going to do well."

Location, Location, Location

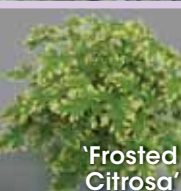
Having dodged the hurricane bullet this year, many foliage growers are poised to move up and onward in 2007, with stronger structures and new technologies. According to Bolusky, however, a number of South Florida growers have or are considering buying property in interior counties to cash in on high real estate values that will help them establish new nurseries altogether. Other growers, he adds, have invested in second locations to ensure that a single disaster won't de-



'Little Prince'



Alocasia lauterbachiana



'Frosted Citrosa'

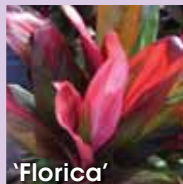
Agri-Starts Inc.

Apopka, FL
407-889-8055
www.agristarts.com

Musa 'Little Prince' is a new dwarf variety that stands at a stout 2 to 2.5 feet when fully grown. 'Little Prince' is the perfect accent to a tropical garden or container. It requires ample moisture, fertile soil, and partial to full sun.

Alocasia lauterbachiana is great for something different in a mixed container centerpiece. This upright alocasia has slender serrated leaves that are deep green with burgundy undersides. It grows best in filtered light and does not require much water. Six-inch pots can be finished in 12 to 15 weeks.

'Frosted Citrosa' is a sport of citrosa with a striking white variegation pattern on the edges of each leaf. The plant requires no growth regulators and grows more compact and tolerates warmer temperatures than the original, all while still emitting its trademark fragrance.



'Florica'



'Janet Craig Jumbo'

Florica Farms Inc.

Wellington, FL
561-791-4588

Dracaena 'Marginata Openweave' is carefully hand braided, using the best quality cane available. It is sprouted under shade to produce foliage for interiorscapes.



'Marginata Openweave'

Cordyline 'Florica' features sturdy red-bronze foliage with hot pink new growth. It prefers bright light in interior settings, or can be used outside for container gardening (above 40°). It makes a great accent plant for color rotations in interiorscapes. The range is 3 to 4 feet.

Dracaena 'Janet Craig Jumbo' offers a darker green, wider leaf than its mother, 'Janet Craig.' 'Jumbo' is good for 14-inch pot production and low light interiorscape settings.

ForemostCo Inc.

Miami, FL, 800-421-8986
www.foremostco.com

Sanseveria cylindrica 'UpRight' is ForemostCo's latest introduction for the inte-

rioriscape market. Native to Brazil, 'UpRight' fits well into many taller interiorscape applications. Durable and long-lasting, 'UpRight' is available in sizes from 12 inches to 48 inches tall.

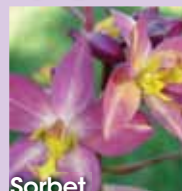
The *Spathiglottis plicata* Sorbet series of ground orchids offers spectacular color in gardens and homes. Free-flowering and winter-hardy through Zone 9, Sorbet orchids can also be grown as patio plants in colder regions. It is now available in four colors: Coconut Cloud, Moonlit Grape, Tropical Pineapple, and Tropical Punch (pictured).

Sanseveria 'Jiboia' is large, broad-leafed, very sturdy, and ready to complement any home or garden. Heights range from 12 inches to 48 inches, available in 10-inch pots. Jiboia's leaf pattern mimics a well-known South American snake.

New Syngonium 'Merry Maria' offers a deep red, long-lasting color that neither fades nor reverts. 'Merry Maria' also retains its compact nature



'UpRight'

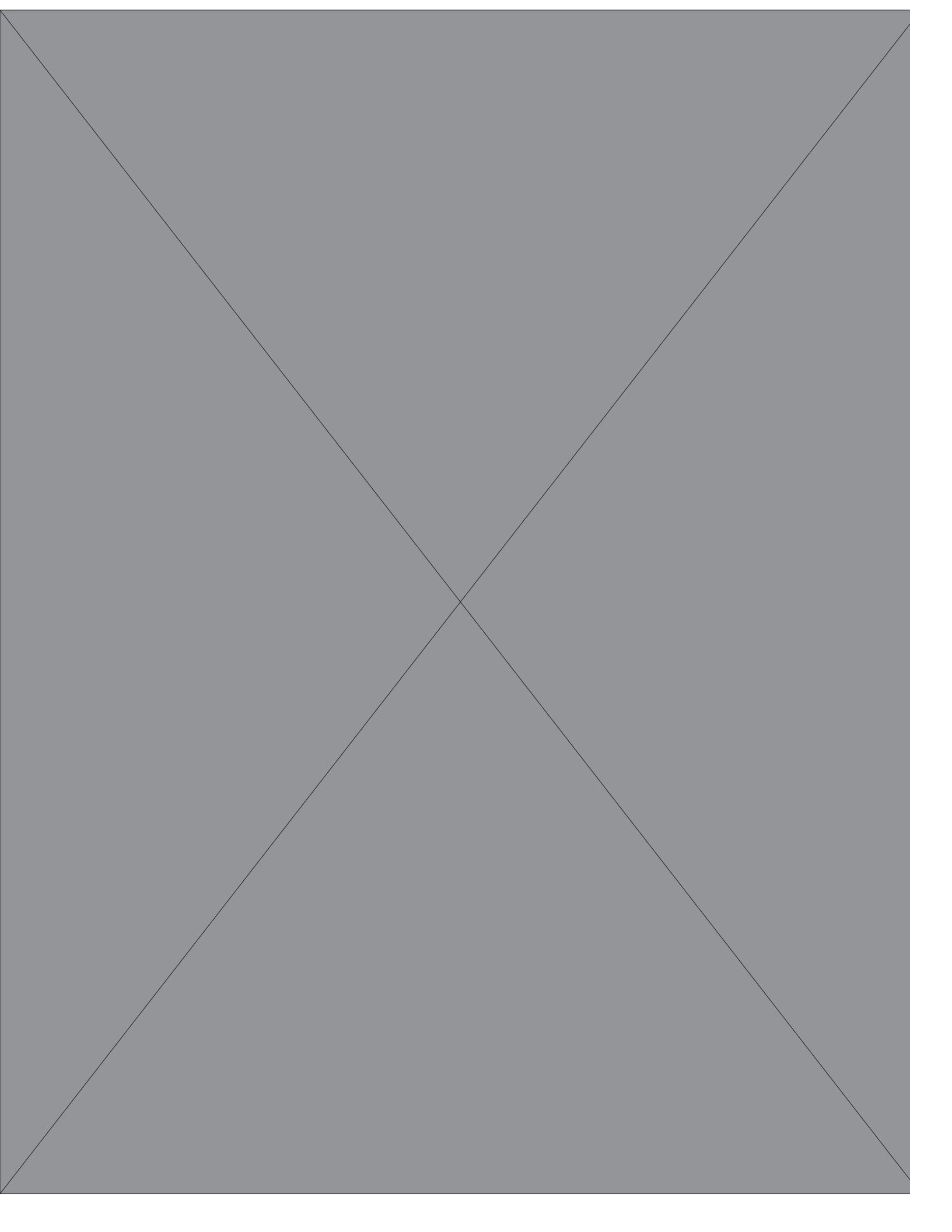


Sorbet



'Jiboia'

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stroy their businesses entirely.

Some growers, such as Prolific Plants, have seen little change due to last year's hurricanes and this year's lack of them. Because they ship almost all of their plants outside of the state of Florida, Poorbaugh says the business has remained stable.

"Since we're geographically diverse in our sales, we haven't noticed any impact because of the hurricanes," he says. "There may have been a little higher demand because of the hurricanes hurting people in other areas, but sales were pretty strong."

Facing Challenges

Challenges in any industry are inevitable. The difference is in how each industry deals with those challenges, and according to Bolusky, this

industry's resilience is key to its ability to survive and thrive.

"There are always challenges, yet this industry is entrepreneurial and creative in overcoming them," he says. He also notes, though, that over the past year, increases in property value have enticed some growers to cash out and retire.

Poorbaugh agrees, saying that agricultural areas and towns are getting closer together, causing many growers to sell.

"There aren't a lot of young people coming into the business, so a lot of times they just decide to sell out for land value and shut business down," he says. "I think that's one of the things we're seeing — some of the nurseries are going away, because the land values are becoming so high, and the

environmental restrictions we have to abide by to operate are getting tougher and tougher."

Bolusky expresses similar sentiments, saying that environmental restrictions are posing a big problem for some growers and that "regulatory actions can shut a nursery — or our industry — in the blink of an eye."

Kerry Herndon, owner of Kerry's Bromeliads in Homestead, FL, sees insurance as yet another growing problem, and Bolusky agrees, saying one of the biggest challenges he has noticed is the rising cost of insurance, as well as lack of insurance altogether for greenhouses in Florida. That's why FNGLA is looking for ways to help by exploring a variety of avenues to develop a customized insurance program for greenhouse structures as an added

New Foliage Varieties *continued*



'Merry Maria'

'Pride of Sumatra'

and is strong and disease-resistant. Use 'Merry Maria' for holidays and as a colorful complement to other syngoniums.

Aglanema 'Pride of Sumatra' combines stunning colors, strong growth characteristics, and low-light requirements. 'Pride of Sumatra' will be available in the latter half of 2007.

Milestone Agriculture

Apopka, FL, 407-889-7868
www.milestoneag.com

Doryopteris cordata, or 'Antenna Fern' is a new, small tropical fern with a unique look. Lower fronds are compact and rounded. Upper fronds are tall and antenna-shaped. It is recommended for small pots.

Recommended for use as a groundcover or border plant, *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens Black Mondo Grass' is a small evergreen perennial. The plant is a slow grower, with a mounding, clumping habit that will reach a height of 15 inches. The foliage starts out green and turns dark black as it matures. Plants spread by underground stolons with thick, fleshy roots. In late summer to early fall, the plant blooms, forming white flowers with a pink flush. Plant them in partial shade to full sun, about 12 inches apart, in moist, well-drained soil.

Cordylone australis 'Red Star' boasts dark red, spiny foliage. Excellent as a specimen or an upright component in mixed containers, it is hardy in Zones 8b–11. It must be protected from frost and should not be over-watered.

Compact and bushy, Polypodium 'Falax' features bright-green, lobed and crested



'Antenna Fern'



'Black Mondo'



'Red Star'



'Falax'

fronds. It is recommended for small and medium pots.

Spath 500 (temporary name) is a medium-sized, bushy spath with dark green leaves and pure white blooms. It is suited for 6-inch pots.

Oglesby Plants International Inc.

Altha, FL, 850-762-3296
www.oglesbytc.com

As the name implies, Anthurium 'Big & Bold' was a selection from Oglesby's in-house breeding program for qualities best suited to large 8- and 10-inch production. Similar in size to cut flower varieties, this structured anthurium produces abundant, large, white flowers (spathes) enhanced with a contrasting pink nose (spadix). As mature flowers age, they turn an attractive green. The foliage is dark green, tough, and resistant to anthurium blight. 'Big & Bold' will complement the best 10-inch upgrade programs.

Rancho Tissue Technologies

Rancho Santa Fe, CA, 858-756-6785
www.ranchoissue.com

Cordylone australis 'Midnight' is a striking cordylone from Burl Mostul of Rare Plant Research. It is a deep red that's almost black, and spiky leaves give it an exotic look. It grows to 3 feet tall and can be used as a phormium replacement in landscapes or containers. It requires partial to full sun and is hardy in Zones 7–12.

Cordylone australis 'Olive' has new growth that emerges emerald green but turns to a deep red as the plant matures. It's perfect in landscapes or containers and grows 4 to 5 feet tall. It does best in full sun or partial shade and is also hardy in Zones 7–12.

Both of these new cordylones are being tissue cultured at Rancho Tissue's U.S. lab.



'Spath 500'



'Big & Bold'



'Midnight'



'Olive'

Casa Flora
#5
4c



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benefit to FNGLA members.

Aside from insurance, rising costs of other commodities, such as plastic pots, soil, and especially labor, is a problem a lot of growers have dealt with over the last year. Herndon points out, though, that there are at least some solutions for the labor issues. "To some extent, we can reduce labor needs with automation and improved processes," he says.

Fuel surcharges have also put pressure on growers. According to Poorbaugh, in the last year, surcharges have reached as high as 29% on total gross invoices. Although fuel prices are decreasing, he says the trucking companies aren't lowering their fuel surcharges as rapidly as they raised them.

"We're handling them [fuel surcharges] by absorbing them, and we're trying to pass the surcharges on, because it's a definable expense," he says. "When it's an expense like a pot price increase that goes up 12%, and the pot represents the smaller percentage of our cost, it's harder to pass on those insidious price increases we get throughout the year."

As much as they try to absorb them, though, the surcharges do take a toll on business, explains Poorbaugh. "What happens with our customers is, when the fuel surcharges make it so expensive to transport our product, they buy less."

Positive Outlook

With 2006 — a rebuilding year — under its belt, the foliage industry is ready to take on 2007, and many are optimistic.

"2007 will be a very good year for growers," says Herndon. He notes that because so many growers have cashed out due to increasing real estate values, fewer suppliers are left. "Good quality plants will be snapped up by the demand," he says.

As for FNGLA, Bolusky says the association "has an ear to the independent garden centers across the nation."

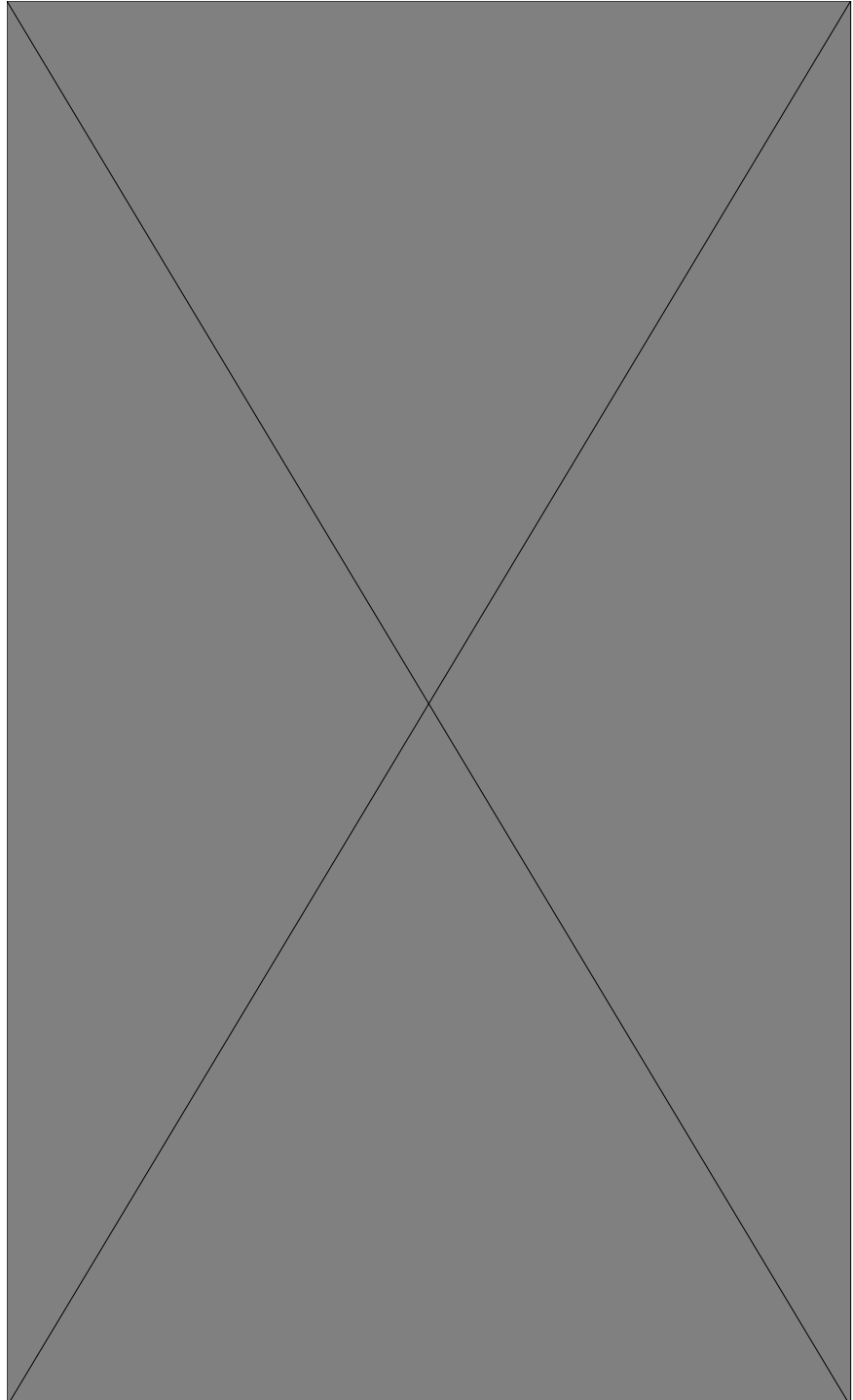
"There is a welcome awakening as to the role of Florida's quality tropical foliage plants," he says. "Since most tropicals and foliage are not seasonal and are available throughout the year,

the potential is for them to become an increasingly important profit center for independent retailers throughout the U.S."

Another potential avenue foliage growers might want to consider is landscaping, says Bolusky. "Landscaping has been extremely strong, and there is no end in sight as to the influx of new

residents into Florida who need and want their homes and offices to have lush landscapes," he says. "FNGLA sees demand up North for tropicals as annuals, and splashy accent patio plants will remain very strong."

That's good news for foliage growers looking to diversify and grow their customer bases in 2007. ■



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