

# Trend-Setting Containers

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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. 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," says 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, FL. Set to open close to the new year, the facility will be situated on a 10-acre site. Using current market and container trend insights from actual growers, Florikan has plans to implement the latest in blow-mold technology and advanced quality-con-

trol 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.

## Air-Pot For Automatic Root Pruning

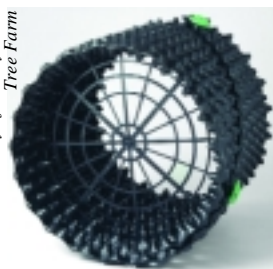
One of the hottest new trends for growing large trees and shrubs is the use of containers that utilize automatic root pruning. The Air-Pot, created by Scotland-based Caledonian Tree Farm, is gaining the attention of

growers in the United States 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, creating 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, FL, says, "Air-pruning pots are inevitably becoming the standard for the landscape nursery industry." After testing multiple growing systems, he realized that the Air-Pot outperformed other production methods. "We got faster growth, better establishment after transplanting, fewer culls, and a decreased mortality rate," Heinrich explains.

Photo courtesy of Cherry Lake Tree Farm



**The Air-Pot features a three-dimensional, cone-shaped exterior wall with open-ended cusps for automatic root pruning.**

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

The continuous air-induced root pruning results in stalwart roots that are efficient in absorbing available water and nutrients, and less vulnerable to temperature extremes.

"Growers are turning to this technology trend more and more because they understand the importance of quality root systems," says Heinrich.

The demand for the Air-Pot among growers has led to a partnership between Caledonian and Florikan, in which Florikan is now the Air-Pot distributor for the Southeast.

## Smaller Pots, Bigger Profits

Another container trend this season is the increasing demand for Eddie Pots. Created by Ed Rosenthal, president of Florikan E.S.A., and 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% smaller than the industry's standard 1000C pot, yet it maintains the visual profile height of the 1000C. This 10% size reduction results in 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 out other advantages of Eddie Pots: "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

Photo courtesy of Florikan



**The Eddie Pot has a wide base for stability and high holes on its sides to reduce the leaching of chemicals and fertilizers.**

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."

## Lock On Added Value

Wholesalers and retailers see locking cover pots as another container trend 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. Colored cover pots allow retailers to easily separate plants by size, color, or price; create attractive merchandizing dis-



Photo courtesy of Florikan

**Cover pots, available in an array of colors, can be incorporated into growers' plant-branding campaigns.**

plays; and aid in inventory control.

The Amerikan Rim-Lock cover pot marries marketability with technology. These decorative cover pots are designed to slip over ubiquitous black nursery pots and allow retailers to get premium prices on plants. While some cover pots are vulnerable to being

Photo courtesy of Florikan



**Growers and retailers can charge a premium for plants in decorative cover pots, like this Rim-Lock cover pot from Florikan.**

switched-out by consumers at retail centers, consumers cannot switch the new patent-pending Rim-Lock cover pots. 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 now viewed 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 consumer who is willing to pay a premium for an attractive pot. Regardless, the beauty is always there in a better-looking plant, and in a better-looking bottom line. ■

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