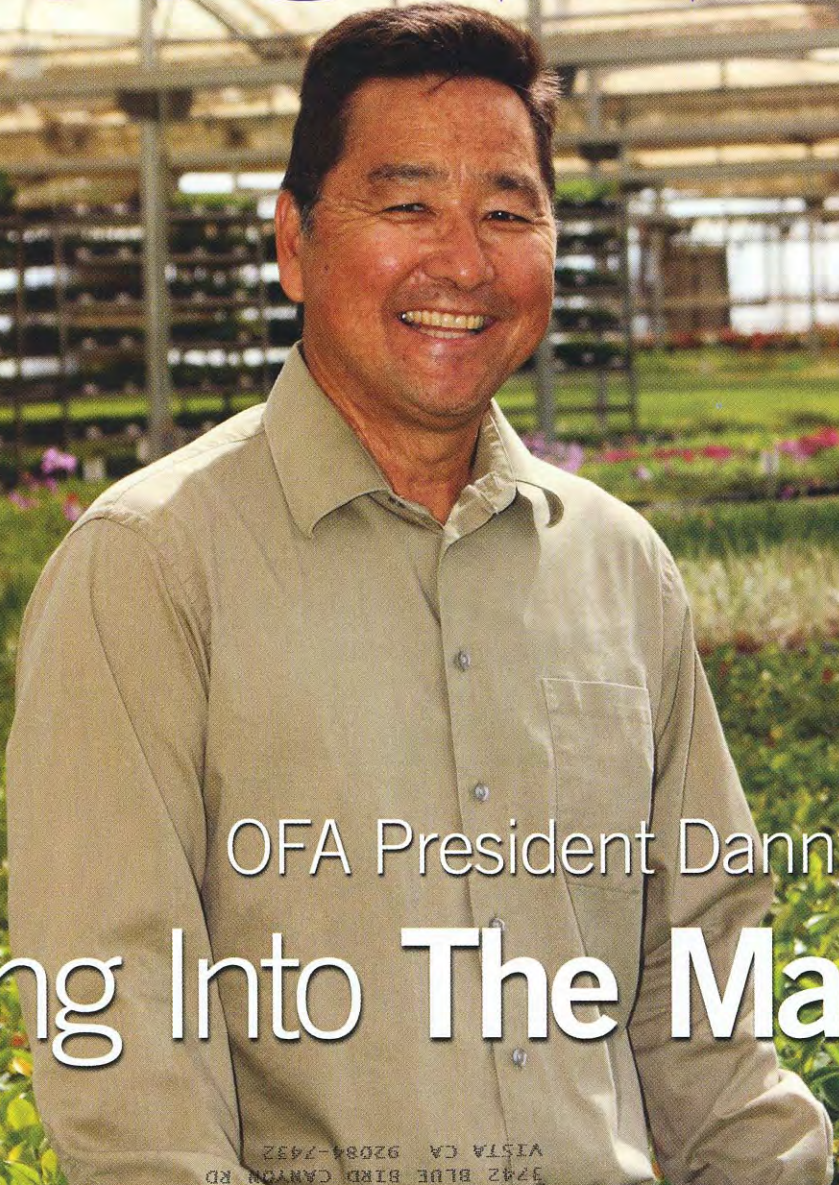


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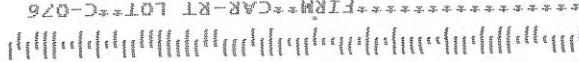


OFA President Danny Takao

## Fitting Into The Market

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# Greenhouse Grower's MEDAL OF EXCELLENCE



Celebrating excellence and leadership of the floriculture industry's top breeders, marketers and innovators for more than 20 years.

## VISIONARIES & VARIETIES

OUR Medal of Excellence awards program has truly become a hall of fame in the varieties world, with many calling it the "Oscars" of our industry. We'll be presenting five awards recognizing the visionaries behind programs that advance varieties, which are the lifeblood of our industry and the grower's pipeline to create new markets.

We celebrate Takii Seed's heritage in hybridizing innovative flower and vegetable varieties by presenting the Japanese flower breeder our Industry Achievement award. For 175 years, Takii has "exceeded the ordinary" by bringing new niche crops to market and adding new twists to established favorites. The global company's focus is solid as it sows seeds of the future.

For the first time, we'll present our marketing award to a large retailer. We're thrilled to honor The Home Depot and Floragem for the successful reinvention of their VIVA! brand. Showcasing premium varieties in eye-catching packaging stimulates impulse purchases and rewards the entire supply chain.

Suspense is building for our three breeding awards – Industry's Choice, Editor's Choice and Reader's Choice. Nominations were chosen from new introductions at the California Spring Trials by our well-rounded industry panel. Editor Delilah Onofrey presents her top five, as well.

Congratulations to our winners and nominees. It is our pleasure to recognize your outstanding achievements and celebrate them with our industry.

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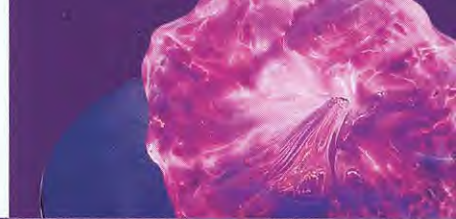
94 BREEDING AWARDS:  
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greenhouse  
GROWER

2010 Medal of Excellence  
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Lambert Peat Moss Inc.





# MORE THAN A PRETTY POT

by **DELILAH ONOFREY**  
Editor  
donofrey@meistermedia.com

**G**REENHOUSE Grower will present its Marketer of the Year award to The Home Depot and Florigem for their successful reinvention and repositioning of the VIVA! brand. Together, the companies have worked with the supply chain to develop a model that rewards innovation in breeding and packaging while delighting consumers at retail.

This will be the first time we present our marketing award to a large retailer. Past honorees have been breeders, growers and grower consortiums, as well as industry organizations that promote top-performing varieties (All-America Selections) and even causes (Plant For The Cure).

VIVA! is a Home Depot brand that is supported by Florigem, a marketing and product development company founded by Ken and Deena Altman of Altman Plants in Vista, Calif. While the VIVA! brand is exclusive to Home Depot, Florigem is focused on creating new live goods products and coordinating the supply chain to ensure offerings are successful from breeder to consumer.

When asked if it's unusual for Home Depot to work with third parties on branding and logistics, Mike DuVall, who is a senior merchant in live goods and captain of the VIVA! brand, says, "Florigem is unique. The company has been instrumental in helping us find new varieties through their contact with the breeders. Although our merchants actively look for products, too, they also have a lot



of responsibilities to the stores."

DuVall says VIVA! is part of Home Depot's four-tiered branding strategy:

- An opening price point for basic seed annuals
- The Vigoro line for improved genetics that are mostly from cuttings
- Proven Winners as the premium annuals brand
- VIVA! for plants that are new and unusual with a story to tell on their own

## Sprouting From Herbs

The first five years, VIVA! spanned across broader assortments and collections of plants instead of targeting individual varieties. The Altmans originally trademarked VIVA! in 2001 to market a line of pleasingly packaged herbs with terra cotta printed pots, large lock-in tags and low-profile trays to show off the packaging. A companion **VivaGarden.com** website was launched to provide consumer support.

The next year, the line expanded to include vegetables, which also supported nutritional initiatives with school districts in California, including Los Angeles.

Shining the spotlight on distinctively different varieties has turned out to be a great strategy for The Home Depot's VIVA! brand.

For the first two years, the brand was regional but then became national with a supporting grower network in 2003. These regional growers in the network then added a VIVA! line of premium color items for spring 2004. The next spring, new collections of perennials, geraniums, gerbera daisies and more debuted in PicturePots. The idea behind the PicturePot was to present the kind of packaging and imagery consumers see in the grocery store for ice cream and cereal.

The packaging was ahead of the rest of the industry. "In 2003, large tags were new, something nobody wanted to do but we took a risk," Deena Altman explains. "We also printed the pot so if someone wanted to put herbs in their kitchen, it would look okay. But then the PicturePot came and we ended up being closely involved with the technology. We saw it as the next big thing."

## Going National

As VIVA! expanded beyond Altman Plants to include other growers, it was time for Florigem to spin off as an in-

dependent entity working with the supply chain. Two key employees were hired to manage the coordination and logistics. The first was Lisa Heredia, who had been the Home Depot merchant for Florida and Puerto Rico. Heredia heads up marketing and communications internally and externally, while managing the packaging and retail presentation side.

Next was Ray French, who had worked as a propagator, grower and manager for large nurseries that produced woody ornamentals, perennials and rare plants. French was actively involved in the launch of Encore azaleas, which bloom multiple times a season, and supporting Knock Out roses and Endless Summer hydrangeas. He welcomed the challenge of doing the same in the annuals world for VIVA! and is focused on working directly with the breeders and growers on new introductions, trials and production protocols. In many ways, he's a talent scout looking for distinctively different varieties for the VIVA! line.

The real breakthrough in the future VIVA! direction was landing the SunPatiens impatiens bred by Sakata and produced by Paul Ecke Ranch in 2006. While the plants may resemble New Guinea impatiens, they are impatiens that can take full sun and rebound from weather extremes better than others. A PicturePot was created just for SunPatiens and this was the first time VIVA! promoted specific varieties this way.

SunPatiens were considered so revolutionary they beat out all the other categories of goods to win the coveted Home Depot Merchandising Innovation Award.

"Each year, we bring the major vendors together for the entire company and select one item that gets the Home Depot Merchandising Innovation Award. You can imagine the competition," says Don Blume, divisional merchandise manager for live goods at Home Depot. "In 2006, SunPatiens won it. When you talk to the average buyer or merchant, plants wouldn't normally come up. With SunPatiens hitting



the market, it was good for the live plant industry to get that awareness."

The next year, Home Depot realigned its branding strategy to make VIVA! a brand that focuses on new and innovative plants that have a story.

"The brand has much better direction now. We didn't have enough definition before," Blume says. "We want VIVA! to stand for plants that are new and innovative with better garden performance. The merchants at Home Depot chose this particular plant and believe in it so much, we've developed an individual container to market that plant. If we don't believe in the plant enough to give it its own container, it probably shouldn't be in VIVA! When the consumer sees the VIVA! brand, she knows it's something new and innovative. The pot tells the story."

### Gaining Momentum

SunPatiens paved the way for more innovative, stand-alone varieties including 'Tex Mex' geranium and 'Lemon Zest,' 'Orange Zest' and 'Crème Brulee' petunias from Dümmer; and 'Tiger Eye' rudbeckia and 'Big Red' geranium from Syngenta Flowers.

While most of the varieties are exclusive to Home Depot, in some cases just the packaging or naming of the variety is exclusive. For instance 'Big Red' is really 'Calliope Red' geranium. The variety name is still indicated on the pot, just not as prominently as 'Big Red,' which tells the story better. 'Tiger Eye' has a special pot with a tiger on it.

One new variety creating a lot of interest this year is 'Rhythm and Blues,' a blue violet petunia with a distinctive white rim from Ball FloraPlant. Martin Jones,

retail manager at Ball Horticultural Co., says VIVA! has been a great marketing vehicle for new plant introductions. Referencing 'Rhythm and Blues,' he says. "This product's success was only achievable through a concerted effort including dependable availability and great service from Ball FloraPlant and Ball Seed Co., successful grower trials, effective marketing elements designed by Floragem, and product and program support from The Home Depot."

Choosing the right plants is what makes the program effective, says Dümmer's Chief Business Development Officer Perry Wismans. "I think Ray French of Floragem has been very careful in selecting the right items for the VIVA! program," Wismans says. "The Red Fox (Dümmer) genetics which entered the program have been a success for the grower and consumer. There is continuity which allows suppliers and users to feel comfortable with the offerings."

In addition to generating more interest from breeders, Blume and DuVall say VIVA! has brought the Home Depot grower network closer together.

"A lot of things are coming to the table to be presented for the brand," Blume says. "Now we're far out enough ahead for the growers to trial the products and develop growing protocols. There will be no misses on the grower side."

DuVall adds, "We want to make sure the products are viable to produce and we're involving the head growers. The last three or four years, grower involvement has quadrupled."

Altman says the entire team appreciates the role the growers have and the importance of their voices being heard through a collaborative process. "Before the next year's palette is decided, we talk about what we want to repeat, what did well and what the features and benefits are of proposed new plants. Our goal is to make it a strong program for retailer, breeder/distributor and grower. Everybody's buy in is important to make this a success." **GG**