

# GrowerTalks®

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# East Coast IDEAS

STORY and PHOTOS by CHRIS BEYTES

If you're looking for flower- and plant-based inspiration, spend a day or two at Fashion In Bloom

When you're driving between Baltimore and Washington D.C. and you're battling beltway traffic with a few million other irate drivers, it's nice to know that Fashion In Bloom (FIB) only has two stops this year, not six. It was the best change they could have made to the three-year-old event—especially if it's destined to live on for future years.

Instead of seeking out greenhouses deep in the Virginia woods and garden centers that are hours from the metro area, all we had to do was fly into Baltimore, rent a car, drive north an hour into southern Pennsylvania to Conard-Pyle, visit there for a spell, then drive back south a bit over two hours to the Annapolis, Maryland, area, where the next day we toured Homestead Growers and Homestead Gardens. Simple! And even simpler if you're a local who doesn't have to arrive by jet. Both FIB stops are convenient to major highways and yet far enough off the beaten path to make for an interesting day out of the greenhouse.

What will you find? Ideas, that's what. New and not-so-new plants, from shrubs and roses to herbs and succulents. New ways to plant them. New ways to combine them. New ways to display them. New ways to dress up your garden center (if you have one). In just a few hours we found enough cool ideas to more than pay for our trip.

The other thing you'll find is people. Experts in their field, such as organic soil specialist Mark Highland of Organic Mechanics; Elin Down, the new president of Monrovia; Steve Hutton, president of Conard-Pyle; and Denny Blew of Centerton Nursery. These are just a few of the many folks we spent

hours with, discussing their products, their markets and the industry in general. Trust us, they'd gladly spend that much time talking with YOU, the customer, rather than us, the press. It's a great opportunity to pick up some valuable information.

But about that question raised in the opening paragraph: Will the event continue? According to Garden Centers of America, their board of directors was to be discussing the event and going over attendee and exhibitor evaluations at their next meeting with an eye for 2008. GCA's Clint Albin fully expects the event to continue, with more good things coming from their new relationship with



Young Mark Highland, founder and president of Organic Mechanics, says "It all starts with the soil," which is why he began studying organic compost as an undergrad at the University of Florida and now runs a company to sell his product. [www.organicmechanicoil.com](http://www.organicmechanicoil.com)