



THE INTERNATIONAL GROWING MEDIA SYMPOSIUM COMES TO THE U.S.

By Dr. Brian Jackson

The International Symposium on Growing Media, Soilless Cultivation, and Compost Utilization in Horticulture convened in Portland, OR, from Aug. 20-25, 2017. This biennial symposium is part of the International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS) and included members of the Commissions of Organic Horticulture, Plant Substrates and Soilless Culture, and Protected Cultivation. At the symposium, there were 150 attendees present from 21 countries representing the Growing Media, Substrate Analysis, Hydroponics, Aquaponics, and Composting for Horticultural Applications Working Groups within ISHS.

The aim of this symposium was to provide a platform for the growing media industry and academic researchers to come together and share new information, generate ideas, and build collaborative partnerships in the areas of soilless cultivation and substrate science. The Growing Media Symposium began in 1983 and the U.S. has hosted it only once (Charlotte, NC, in 2009) before this year.

The Industry Is Changing Rapidly

Substrate science is as technical, evolving, and precision-based

as any other area of horticultural crop production. With the ever-increasing production of ornamental, edible, medicinal, and recreational crops in controlled environments, the need for specialized substrates will only increase in the years ahead. Scientists and industry professionals from around the world joined in a unified agreement that our industry must continue to evolve to meet the ever-growing needs of our industry. Substrates are now being designed, engineered, constructed, and used like never before.

Emerging Markets Need to be Part of Discussions

The event included tours of greenhouse, nursery, and substrate producers in the Portland area, and had more than 60 speaker presentations and 40 poster sessions covering a broad range of topics related to substrate science. The North American industry was well represented both in sponsorships and participation, with numerous Canadian peat producers present, as well as growing media manufacturers, hydroponic product/system distributors, fertilizer companies, compost companies, plant/soil analytical companies, private consultants, coconut coir distributors, wood fiber

This International Symposium, with representatives from 21 countries, covered new market opportunities, generated innovative ideas, and offered first-hand information to more than 150 attendees.

manufacturers, and academic researchers from across the U.S.

In addition to a near total eclipse on August 21 in Portland, there were many topics of primary and frequent discussions, including: 1) the worldwide revolution of wood-fiber usage in growing media, 2) the expanding cannabis industry and its growing needs, 3) the debate of growing media regulations and standards, 4) the role of biological additives to growing media, 5) the future of composting and compost systems, 6) raw material sourcing and processing, 7) environmental and governmental regulations, 8) microbiology of organic substrates, 9) substrate induced nutrient relations and deficiencies, and 10) substrate hydrology and water capture for maximum crop efficiency.

A published summary of the proceedings will be printed and made available to the public in the near future so that all may take advantage of the information and dialog discussed at this meeting. The next International Symposium on Growing Media will take place in Milan, Italy in the summer of 2019.

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