

**THURSDAY, JULY 23, 2026**

**Savage Farms, Inc.  
Deerfield, MA**



**SAVE \$\$\$!**  
Register online by June 30  
and save \$40/attendee.

**THROWBACK GREEN INDUSTRY**

**Hosted by Savage Farms, Inc.**

**Sponsored by the Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association**

**Supported by Pioneer Gardens, Inc. and  
The Vermont Nursery & Landscape Association**

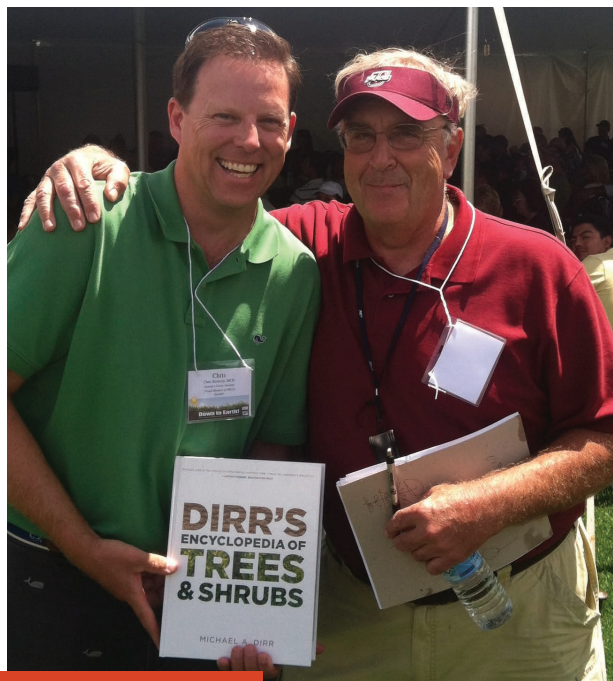


**WHO SHOULD ATTEND? YOU!  
WHY ATTEND?**

Professionals in the green industry will not want to miss this great summer opportunity for education, recertification, and networking!

Down to Earth attracts more than 600 industry professionals representing garden centers, retail and wholesale nurseries, greenhouse growers, landscape contractors, maintenance, designers, and architects.

It's the place to connect with industry colleagues and friends. **Scan the QR code or visit [mnlA.com/dte26](http://mnlA.com/dte26) for more information.**



**EARN UP TO 3 MCH CREDITS**  
while connecting with industry peers!

**WELCOME BACK  
MICHAEL DIRR!**





# GET DOWN TO EARTH THIS JULY!



**SUMMER IS FOR VACATIONS AND ALL THINGS FUN.** For green industry professionals it's a great time to take stock and learn about new products, trends and business solutions.

- Find business knowledge about new plants and products, sales, operations and profitability.
- Attend education sessions organized by your professional colleagues with amazing speakers.
- Visit more than 40 exhibitors, and join attendees that include growers, independent garden centers and landscape firms.
- A great lunch and beer garden offering a lively afternoon of networking

We've put together a program packed with MCH and pesticide recertification credits! **VISIT [Mnla.com/DTE26](http://Mnla.com/DTE26) TODAY FOR REGISTRATION.**

## WHERE?

Our 2026 host site is the expansive and lush green turf fields of **SAVAGE FARMS IN DEERFIELD**. Founded in 1910, since 1963 Savage Farms has pioneered cutting edge turf products for New England. Attendees will get an up-close look at sod production. From premium bluegrass and drought tolerant RTF (rhizomatous tall fescue) sod to advanced generations of athletic and sports field products, this Massachusetts farm offers an unparalleled product mix.

## WHO'S THERE?

**AMAZING SPEAKERS WITH BLAZING NEW INDUSTRY TRENDS, THE COOLEST BUSINESS SOLUTIONS & MORE!**

Hands-on product demos to get you ready for anything and a great lunch with a lively afternoon of networking.

## WHY?

**THE 2026 EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM WILL BE DYNAMIC AND INNOVATIVE WITH EXPANDED HANDS-ON DEMONSTRATIONS.**

- Challenge yourself with the MCH sponsored Plant I.D.
- Turfgrass Selection & Sod Cutting DEMO

## HAVE FUN WHILE LEARNING

Discover new products and plants while connecting with our engaging exhibitors and education sessions. Unwind in the **BBC BEER "GARDEN,"** where you can enjoy a nostalgic lineup of classic outdoor games from every decade. This year's program promises a fresh, interactive conference experience you won't want to miss.



## SUPPORTER TOUR

**JOIN US FOR TOURS** at nearby Pioneer Gardens. Pioneer Gardens, Inc., are producers of quality field-grown bare root and greenhouse plugs to wholesale growers and finishers throughout North America. With over 25 years of dependable service, we continue to strive to be your #1 choice for American Grown perennials, bare root & rooted liners.

## VENDOR & SPONSOR OPPORTUNITIES!

Promote your products and services and be showcased during our event, in *Pro Grow News* and online throughout [Mnla.com](http://Mnla.com)! Learn more at: [Mnla.com/dte26](http://Mnla.com/dte26)



**VISIT [Mnla.com/DTE26](http://Mnla.com/DTE26) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER ONLINE!**

# DOWN TO EARTH AGENDA & EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS

## QUICK GLANCE AGENDA

- 7:00am** Registration & Trade Show Open
- 8:00–9:00am** Early Bird Plant I.D.  
—Earn an Extra MCH Credit!
- 8:00am–3:00pm** Classroom Sessions & Demos; Coffee & Vendor Networking
- 9:00am–2:00pm** Plant I.D. Tent Open Throughout the Event
- 10:00–11:00am** Container Competition
- 10:30am–1:30pm** Lunch
- 12:00pm & 1:00pm** Tours of Pioneer Gardens
- 3:00pm** Stay for the music, fun & networking!

## SESSION A 8:00AM

### Spotted Lanternfly: Impact, Current Distribution, and Management Options

• **Location: Barn** • Elizabeth Barnes, Ph.D., Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources • Spotted lanternfly is a highly visible invasive pest that feeds on over 100 plant species. They feed in large numbers on everything from garden plants to street trees, making them a major nuisance pest in yards, parks, and outdoor venues, in addition to killing grapes, black walnut saplings, and Ailanthus saplings. This presentation will cover the issues they cause, their current distribution, and an overview of management options. 🌿 Pesticide credit requested.

### Beyond the “Builders’ Special” • Location:

**Tent A** • Jen Kettell, BCMA, MCH, Radiant Leaf Consulting • No judgment here! Jen Kettell got her start in the late '80s planting the classic lineup—rhododendrons, yews, and forsythia—around new home foundations. Fast forward to today, and she shares how her approach has evolved. Learn how to rethink those legacy plantings, explore a refined palette of appropriately sized woody species, and transform foundation beds into dynamic, lasting landscapes that move beyond the old “builder’s special.”

## SESSION B 9:00AM

### Kickoff with Savage Farms Welcome •

**Location: Tent A** • Jay Savage, President, Savage Farms Inc.

### Hydrangeas Then and Now: From Garden Staples to Genetic Game Changers •

**Location: Tent A** • Mike Dirr, author and professor of horticulture at the University of Georgia • Since their 18th-century introduction to the West, hydrangeas have journeyed from temperamental French classics like ‘Mme. Emile Mouillere’ to the revolutionary “reblooming” breakthroughs of the 2004 *Endless Summer*® series. This session explores how decades of breeding have “shuffled the genetic deck,” resulting in once-impossible traits: pink *H. arborescens*, ultra-hardy *H. serrata* buds, and the vivid merlot hues of modern *H. paniculata*. Join us to explore how these genetic game changers are redefining the limits of the modern landscape.

### Harness the Power of Mycorrhizae in Production and Landscape • Location:

**Barn** • Blair Busenbark, MS, MBA, Mycorrhizal Applications • Blair Busenbark breaks down the science of mycorrhizae and how this time-tested natural partnership can strengthen modern greenhouse, nursery, and landscape practices. From improving water and nutrient efficiency in production to reducing transplant shock and boosting plant resilience in the field, mycorrhizae offer practical benefits across the green industry. Whether you’re growing, installing, or maintaining, this session highlights how working with nature—just like the industry’s roots—can improve plant performance, lower costs, and increase customer satisfaction.

## SESSION C 10:00AM

### 5th Annual Container Garden Competition •

**Location: Tent B** • Deborah Trickett, The Captured Garden • Join MNLA for the fifth annual competition and education! Contestants will be challenged to create a container garden using provided materials. Deborah will highlight container gardening trends and pick the brains of contestants during the competition.



### What’s New in Solution Central • Location:

**Tent A** • Chris Kennedy, MCH, Kennedy’s Country Gardens and Jim Connolly, MCH, Weston Nurseries • Take a step back in time—and forward in your business! Solution Central exhibitors are bringing the best of the green industry from the ‘60s to today, showcasing tools, services, and products designed to help you succeed. From retro classics to modern must-haves, discover what’s new, improved, and ready for what’s next.

### Sustainability and Turfgrass Selection & Sod Cutting DEMO • Location: Barn •

Trevor Elliott, Barenbrug USA • Sometimes the smartest solutions start with the seed. This session explores how choosing the right turfgrass varieties can naturally reduce water, fertilizer, and maintenance needs. From improved genetics to enhanced seed technologies, learn how thoughtful selection leads to healthier turf, lower inputs, and long-term performance—proving that sustainable results often come from getting the fundamentals right.

## SESSION D 11:00AM

### A Growing Problem: Potential Invasiveness of Ornamental Plants • Location: Tent A •

Jennifer Forman Orth, Ph.D., Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources • Are there potentially invasive plants lurking in local nurseries and retail plant stores? Take a peek into some of the research going on in Massachusetts and nearby states to discover some of the species that are not currently prohibited in Massachusetts, but could be in the future. Learn what goes into the management of some of these species that are causing problems in natural areas, both in and outside of our state, and the potential for climate change to alter which invasive plants can thrive here.

### Elegant Plants for Fine Garden Designs •

**Location: Barn** • Mandy Bayer, PhD, UMass Amherst Extension • Great gardens have always balanced structure and plant selection to create lasting beauty. This session explores a curated palette of elegant plants that bring texture, layering, and depth to the landscape. Learn how thoughtful plant choices can elevate designs, creating refined, dynamic spaces rooted in timeless garden traditions.

## SESSION E 1:00PM

### Restoration after Malpruning • Location:

**Tent A** • Jen Kettell, BCMA, MCH, Radiant Leaf Consulting • Some landscapes stand out—for all the wrong reasons. From stub cuts to “lollipopped” shrubs, many of us inherit plants that need corrective care. Jen Kettell walks through how to recognize the signs of improper pruning and apply thoughtful, time-tested techniques to restore health and structure. Learn how to set realistic timelines, communicate expectations with clients, and guide trees and shrubs back to a more natural, balanced form—making landscapes eye-catching for the right reasons.

### Pesticide Laws, Regulations & More •

**Location: Barn** • Laurie Manning, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Pesticide Inspector II • The session will cover current State and Federal regulations for greenhouses, lawn care, farmers and others that apply pesticides. 🌿 Pesticide credit requested.

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS 2:00PM

### Old Friends, New Tricks: Classic Shrubs Reimagined for Today’s

**Landscapes • Location: Tent A** • Mike Dirr, author and professor of horticulture at the University of Georgia • While garden trends come and go, time-honored species like *Abelia* × *grandiflora* have evolved from 19th-century staples into versatile, 21st-century powerhouses. Learn how breeding breakthroughs have transformed “old-fashioned” favorites into high-performance cultivars—such as ‘Kaleidoscope’ and ‘Peach Perfection’—that offer superior pollinator appeal, drought tolerance, and deer resistance.

Beyond *Abelia*, we will explore the exciting renaissance of classic genera including *Viburnum*, *Syringa*, *Hydrangea*, and the speaker’s own 15-year journey breeding *Baptisia*. Join us to see how these “new tricks” make classic shrubs the perfect solution for the challenges of the modern garden.



VISIT [MNA.COM/DTE26](https://mna.com/dte26) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER ONLINE!

# WELCOME OUR 2026 SPEAKERS!



**ELIZABETH BARNES** is the Forest Pest Outreach Coordinator with the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources and previously worked as the Exotic Forest Pest Educator at Purdue University. She studied biology as an undergraduate at Mount Holyoke College and received her Doctorate in plant-insect interactions from the University of Denver where she studied tent caterpillars and fall webworms.



**JENNIFER FORMAN ORTH** is an Environmental Biologist for the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, where she works on a number of botanical and entomological issues, including insect pests, invasive plants, plant resources for pollinators, and mosquito control. Jennifer completed her Ph.D. at UMass Boston, where she studied the odd breeding system of Japanese knotweed. She also has a master's degree from Boston University's Center for Energy and Environmental Studies.

**MANDY BAYER** has a BS in landscape contracting from Penn State, a masters in Crop Sciences from the University of Illinois and PhD in horticulture from the University of Georgia. Before returning to grad school she worked as a landscape designer. She specializes in landscape plants and teaches courses in plant identification and plant propagation.



**CHRIS KENNEDY** is a Massachusetts Certified Horticulturist (MCH) and the third generation owner of Kennedy's Country Gardens in Scituate. Chris earned his degree in landscape contracting at Penn State University and is a practicing landscape designer. He is also an MNLA past-president.



**BLAIR BUSENBARK** received his BS in Plant Science from Utah State University, and an MS in Horticulture and MBA from the University of Maryland. In his current position, Blair combines his education and experience to help greenhouse and nursery growers, landscapers and garden centers realize the fantastic potential of biorational products and mycorrhizal use.



**JEN KETTELL, BCMA** is a consulting arborist serving the New England area (and occasionally beyond!). As the owner of Radiant Leaf Consulting, she shares her passion for horticulture through the training she provides to both homeowners and green industry professionals. She started landscaping as a teen, continuing to farming, greenhouse production, and finally the Arnold Arboretum before she began building Radiant Leaf Consulting. Today, Radiant Leaf is celebrating over ten years as a small local business.



**JIM CONNOLLY** is the Garden Center Manager at Weston Nurseries in Chelmsford, Massachusetts. He has worked in the industry for over 40 years and has been involved with all aspects of retail and wholesale operations. Connolly is also a past president of the Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association and has given a lot of his time to helping industry groups over the years. He is known for setting high standards for customer service and quality control of operations.

**Laurie Manning** is a Pesticide Inspector II for the last 21 years for Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources. Laurie is also the Worker Protection Standard Coordinator for Massachusetts.



From humble beginnings gardening with his father to earning advanced degrees, **MICHAEL A. DIRR'S** passion for horticulture blossomed into a transformative career. His groundbreaking work laid the foundation for revolutionary advancements in ornamental plant breeding. Notably, his discovery of the reblooming *Hydrangea macrophylla* forever changed the hydrangea market, leading to the flourishing Endless Summer brand. With over 30 plant patents to his name, Dirr's innovative spirit continues to inspire, as he collaborates with partners at Premier Introductions, Inc., nurturing a future rich in botanical possibilities.



Award-winning container garden designer **DEBORAH TRICKETT** has worked in the gardening industry for over 30 years, starting with her first job in a greenhouse at age 13 until the present as the owner of The Captured Garden. Deborah is a frequent lecturer, speaking at the New England Spring Flower Show, The Connecticut Flower Show, the Newport Flower Show, the Northwest Flower and Garden Show, as well as The Philadelphia International Flower Show. She has also shared her passion for perennials at the Perennial Plant Association Annual Symposium. She was a featured speaker at the Grand Garden Show on Mackinac Island. She has taught classes and workshops at the Arnold Arboretum in Boston. Her work has been featured in *The Boston Globe*, *The American Gardener*, *Garden Gate* and *New England Home* magazines as well as on the TV show *New England Dream Home*.



**TREVOR ELLIOTT** is a turf expert with over a decade of experience spanning golf course management, landscape operations, and market development. Currently serving as Pro Turf Market Development Manager for Barenbrug USA, Trevor works at the intersection of agronomy and business strategy, driving brand growth, delivering technical education, and connecting professionals with innovative solutions.

## ATTENDEE PRICING

### MNLA members

\$75/person by June 30

\$115/person after June 30 and for walk-ins

### VNLA members

\$75/person by June 30

\$115/person after June 30 and for walk-ins

### MCH (non-member)

\$85/person by June 30

\$125/person after June 30 and for walk-ins

### Non-member

\$95/person by June 30

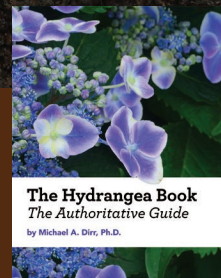
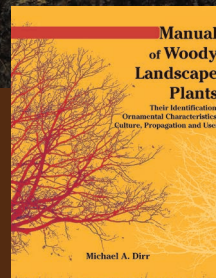
\$135/person after June 30 and for walk-ins

### Full time students & children (16 & under)

\$35/person

### Battle of the Container Garden Designers

\$40/person *Please note, all competitors must also be registered for the summer conference.*



## BOOK SIGNING

**Books available for purchase at discounted rate when registering online!**

The Manual of Woody Landscape Plants (paperback): \$74.80

The Hydrangea Book (paperback): \$39.95

**VISIT [MNLA.COM/DTE26](https://www.mnla.com/dte26) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER ONLINE!**

# THURSDAY, JULY 23, 2026

## Savage Farm

128 Lower Road  
Deerfield, Massachusetts

This competition is made possible by the generosity of our sponsors.  
List as of June 5, 2026



Let the challenge, the fun and the judging begin!

You are invited to compete for a chance to be crowned "MNLA Container Garden Designer of the Year!"

Participation in the competition is only \$40 per entry (one entry per person). Participants need to be registered for the full Down to Earth Summer Conference & Trade Show program. Winners will be announced on-site at 3:00pm immediately following Keynote Speaker Michael Dirr.

**VISIT [MNLACOM/DTE26](https://mnlacommunity.com/dte26)**  
for more information and to register online.



THROWBACK GREEN INDUSTRY

## PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD

1st prize	\$300	3rd prize	\$100
2nd prize	\$200	4th prize	\$50

**Another chance to win!** Those contestants not placing 1 thru 4 will have a chance to WIN back their registration in a random raffle with *two names being drawn to win \$40.00 each!*

## RULES & REGULATIONS

- 1. Pre-registration** is recommended on or before June 30, 2026 at \$40/entry (one entry per person) as there are only 40 spots available.
- 2. Qualifications:** This competition is open to ALL who want the chance to be crowned MNLA's Container Garden Designer of the Year. Registration to the MNLA Down to Earth Summer Conference & Trade Show is a prerequisite to register for the competition.
- 3. Assembly:** Container gardens will be assembled on-site at 10:00am. Participants will have approximately 30 minutes to complete their design. Plant material will be provided.
- 4. The completed work must:**
  - A. Be set up within the container supplied;
  - B. Must use the plants supplied;
  - C. Must use the soil provided;
  - D. Only include 1 plant/prop from private arsenal;
  - E. Choose a decade ('60s-2026) and add a small label with the decade and a title for your design. No need to overthink it—this is all about fun and creativity! Examples: Flower Power Planter, Disco Garden, Neon Nights, Grunge Greens, Y2K Minimal, Farmhouse Fresh, Pollinator Paradise, and Future of Green Design.
- 5. Judging** will be held on July 23 (11:00am-2:00pm) by event attendees for the People's Choice Award. **Winners will be announced on-site at 3:00pm** immediately following Keynote Speaker Michael Dirr.
- 6. Photographs of all entries will be taken.** By entering the competition, entrants give full permission for all photos by MNLA and its agents to be used in newsletters, social media, website, display, promotional and educational purposes.
- 7. The decision of the judges is final.**