



Essen, January 22, 2024

40th IPM ESSEN:

"Our heart beats green" - more dynamic than ever!

A review with an outlook by Andreas Löbke, CO CONCEPT

The motto of this year's IPM ESSEN hits the nail on the head. "Our heart beats green". Feeling green, thinking green and operating internationally - this is still Messe Essen's recipe for success for the International Plant Fair (IPM) today. When IPM ESSEN was founded in 1983, it was initially a delicate plant alongside the well-known trade fairs in Germany at the time. Critically eyed by many when it was founded, IPM ESSEN has established itself over the past 40 years as one of the most important events in the horticultural and plant industry. Since then, it has attracted thousands of visitors from all over the world to Essen every year, not far from the Lower Rhine, Germany's largest growing region - and very easy to reach for important horticultural nations in the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark.

As a platform for the industry, IPM ESSEN offers exhibitors from the fields of plants, technology, floristry and garden decoration, and gardening and landscaping an excellent stage for the wide range of products and services relating to gardens and plants and is now regarded as an important meeting place for the trade, horticultural businesses, nurseries, landscape architecture, politics, associations and other experts in the industry. Production and sales of the green value chain come together at IPM ESSEN.

Over the past four decades, IPM ESSEN has developed in parallel with the industry and thus serves as a good mirror of developments. Messe Essen has always had its finger on the pulse of the times and implemented trends and social currents. One example of the parallel development is the number of international participations. As international trade grew, so did the number of applications and registrations from exhibitors from all over the world. Whereas in 1983 there were only a few international exhibitors, today there are around 50 exhibitor nations at IPM ESSEN, of which around 20 have official joint with their typical national products. In line with the participants, visitors now come not only from Germany, but from all over the world to take part in the trade fair, exchange ideas, trade and start the new season rich in information and ideas.

For the 40th IPM ESSEN, it is time to look back at how horticulture has changed over the last four decades and with it today's world's leading horticultural trade fair IPM ESSEN.



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Veröffentlichung kostenfrei -
Beleg erbeten
Publication free of charge -
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The 1980s: Foundation of IPM ESSEN

In the 1980s, the garden market was different to today. At that time, garden architecture was characterized by geometric shapes and strict lines. Symmetrical beds, lawns and hedges were often laid out. The use of formal elements such as steps, terraces and walls was also typical of this period. In the garden itself, garden gnomes, birdhouses and other decorative elements of the time were used in the design. It was only later that the English garden style became popular, in which a natural and relaxed atmosphere was emphasized by perennial beds, meadows and romantic seating areas, as well as the use of natural stones, ponds and water features.

Green houseplants such as monstera, dragon tree, ficus, fern and ivy were very popular in the 1980s. The green plant range experienced a renaissance, driven by a new type of consumer, the "jungle fan". Young people achieved double-digit annual growth rates in sales of these ranges. The classic demand for flowering pot plants consisted of 25% azaleas and cyclamen. Classic items such as poinsettias accounted for 24% in the fourth quarter of 1980. At that time, orchids were still listed under "Other" in the consumption statistics.

German production showed a downward trend; there was talk of a crisis; the number of production companies declined, especially in cut flower cultivation. Publications at the time spoke of "the consequence of rising energy costs and the associated increase in competition from abroad". German production increasingly focused on pot, bedding and balcony plants and began to expand its product range impressively and rapidly to this day.

The supply of cut flowers increasingly came from climatically favorable production in third countries and from the Netherlands. Here, companies switched massively from vegetable production to the more lucrative cut flower production.

While growing fruit and vegetables in your own garden declined in the years before IPM ESSEN was founded and was not considered particularly chic, growing your own fruit and vegetable garden was back in fashion at the beginning of the 1980s. Self-sufficiency gradually became fashionable again, but gardens often no longer allowed for large plants. The growing importance of the garden and greenery was also evident in the 1980s with the emergence of covered terraces and conservatories, which became increasingly popular in the 1980s to increase the use of the garden as an extended living space. Here you could linger in the garden even when the weather was bad, creating a link between indoors and outdoors.

During this time, IPM ESSEN showcased everything that reflected the spirit of the times and was on display in German horticulture as well as in neighboring countries.

Ornamental shrubs and trees in particular were always well represented at IPM ESSEN, not least because the tree nurseries were among the first exhibitors.

In addition to ornamental shrubs and trees, cut flowers and floristry also have a firm place at Messe Essen. In 1986, for the fourth IPM ESSEN, FLORBEDA was integrated into the leading international trade fair. At the same time, the first plant bowl competition of the Trade Association of German Florists (FDF) NRW was held there in cooperation with Messe Essen, to which the bouquet competition was later added. The first floral IPM competitions were thus launched in the mid-1980s.

During this time, the Westphalian gardeners also transferred their horticultural technology exhibition in Hamm to the IPM in Essen.

The 1990s: IPM ESSEN continues to develop

The 1990s were already characterized by the first signs of a new, ecological way of thinking in horticulture. Terms such as "use of natural resources", "composting", "mulching" and the "renunciation of chemical fertilizers and pesticides" became commonplace.

The first signs of more greenery in urban areas can be seen in the 1990s with the increase and prioritization of balcony gardens, roof gardens and community gardens.

English-style gardens with lush planting and romantic elements such as roses and clematis became increasingly popular. Asian-inspired gardens with bamboo, water features and stone arrangements were also popular at this time. The creation of garden ponds with aquatic plants and small fish was also a common practice in the 1990s. A calm, relaxing atmosphere was created by the rippling water and the variety of aquatic and waterside plants.

The importance of self-sufficiency through one's own herb and vegetable garden increased. The cultivation of culinary herbs and seasonal vegetables gained momentum and was typical of many hobby gardeners at this time, but had not yet reached its zenith.

Garden accessories and decorative elements were a rapidly growing segment in the garden in the 1990s. More and more consumers discovered garden furniture, greenhouses, trellises and sculptures for more individuality and design variety in their gardens. Accordingly, more and more exhibitors from this sector came to IPM ESSEN. The first demand for innovative garden tools and technologies, such as automatic irrigation, was also already being met at this time.

The use of exotic and tropical plants became increasingly popular in the home. Plants such as orchids, bromeliads and palms had eye-catching leaves and flowers and were very popular alongside ficus, yucca palms and ivy.

With the increase in imports for the German market, especially in the cut flower sector, the exhibitor area in the BGI Trade Center at IPM ESSEN also became large, where all export-oriented nations and wholesale importers have since met regularly and strengthened their business relationships.

The 2000s: a mature phase in a stagnating environment

In the 2000s, the market became more mature. The use of Mediterranean plants in horticulture experienced a real boom: oleander, lavender, rosemary and cypresses were increasingly planted in gardens, giving them a Mediterranean flair. The demand for these plants was correspondingly high, which consequently led to an increase in the number of IPM exhibitors from Central Europe.

In the 2000s, consumers increasingly sought inspiration for garden design at garden fairs and exhibitions, which were specifically designed for the general public and suddenly became increasingly popular. Here, garden lovers could find inspiration and gather new ideas for their own garden design. This led to an increased demand for flowers and plants, especially solitary plants.

Naturally, horticultural companies also felt this trend in their demand. Accordingly, the specialist trade at IPM ESSEN was looking more intensively for stronger plants in larger pots. The range of plants on display at IPM ESSEN was even broader and more varied, and the plant sizes on show were larger in line with demand.

Petunias, geraniums and fuchsias were part of the standard range of bedding and balcony plants, which have been increasingly available from system retailers and discounters since the 2000s.

In horticultural production, the 2000s saw an increasing shift away from conventional cultivation methods towards organic/ecological cultivation. Controlled, integrated cultivation established itself as the standard of horticultural practice. The range of organic plants and organic garden products offered by nurseries grew, which was also reflected in the IPM exhibitors' offerings. Plants for snack gardens, often produced according to organic standards, are becoming increasingly popular. Flowers and plants from native regions and with lower water requirements have also been a firm fixture among the exhibitors at IPM ESSEN since the turn of the millennium.

In 2008, the IPM Novelty Showcase was also installed, in which the new plants of the year are described in various categories by a jury of experts and the assessment of

trade visitors. The aim was and still is to provide fresh impetus in an often stagnating market. While there were only five new products in five different categories in 2008, more and more categories have been covered by new products over the years. Today, innovations are awarded in the categories of cut flowers, flowering houseplants, potted plants, green houseplants, woody plants, bedding and balcony plants, spring bloomers, perennials, snack fruit and vegetables and often an additional special prize. Over the past 15 years, a total of more than 90 winning novelties have been selected and awarded. Today, the IPM ESSEN Novelty Show is both a driving force and a springboard for innovations in the green sector.

The last ten years: Corona isn't the only thing boosting the market

The 2010s saw a further increase in awareness of environmental issues and sustainability in horticulture. Trends such as "urban gardening", "edible city" and the trend towards plants for smaller gardens, balconies or even roof gardens led to the emergence of more urban gardens, community gardens and vertical gardens.

Overall, after decades of a relatively stable market for flowers and plants, there were signs of growing interest in green products, which peaked during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The market volume for flowers and plants in Germany in 2021 was around ten percent above the normal level during coronavirus. At times, consumer demand for greenery could not be satisfied. Houseplants experienced a revival in the 2010s, with low-maintenance plants such as ficus and monstera in particular once again becoming an important part of interior design, helping to green rooms and improve air quality. Another revival, only with a different buying motivation than in 1980. In line with the strong demand, all players in the industry were looking forward to exchanging ideas with each other at IPM ESSEN 2023, the first trade fair after the two-year coronavirus lockdown.

One trend in the 2010s, which was further fueled by the pandemic, was the demand for regional flowers and plants. More and more consumers turned their attention to short supply chains and allowed horticulture to flourish again locally in all regions of Germany.

The influence of social media over the last ten years should not be underestimated. The spread of social media and the popularity of garden blogs have enabled hobby gardeners to share their experiences and tips, gather inspiration and hype the topic themselves through influencers and companies.

Since 2012, at the 30th IPM ESSEN, the topic of plant marketing has received special attention with the "Colour your Life", later "Show your Colours Award". The best story is honored. Accordingly, trade visitors will not only find horticultural and floral inspiration at IPM ESSEN, but also supporting ideas in marketing.

IPM ESSEN has always been regarded as a driving force that always picks up on important topics and trends for the industry and presents them not only in the supporting program on the numerous stages. For example, the seminar "The Green City" celebrated its premiere at IPM ESSEN in 2014. Here, the future of urban greenery was discussed ahead of its time.

The European Nursery Reception at IPM ESSEN was launched in 2014, among other things, in order to provide as much international impetus as possible and consciously promote international exchange. The Association of German Nurseries invites visitors to its stand in cooperation with the European Nurserystock Association. Nurserymen and women from all over Europe come together here.

40 years of change - IPM ESSEN as a catalyst

Over the last 40 years, horticulture in Germany and internationally has continued to develop and change. The keywords of this development are

- **Technological advances:** The development of new technologies has also opened up new possibilities in horticulture. Automation, controlled atmosphere greenhouses, optimized irrigation and fertilization systems and various methods of protection against pests and diseases have improved the efficiency and quality of horticultural production.
- **Sustainability:** In view of increased environmental awareness, significant changes have also taken place in horticulture. The use of environmentally friendly cultivation methods, the avoidance of chemical pesticides and fertilizers and the promotion of biodiversity have played an increasingly important role over the last four decades.
- **Structural change:** The size of horticultural businesses has increased over time. At the same time, the number of businesses has decreased significantly. This development goes hand in hand with general professionalization and specialization in order to survive in a highly competitive market.
- **Assortments and sales channels:** At the beginning of IPM ESSEN, the product ranges were still manageable compared to today and were geared towards the regional market via specialist retailers, but today it can be seen that the product ranges have expanded significantly and can increasingly be found nationwide in system retailers and discount stores. At the same time, consumer awareness of

regional products and short supply chains has grown in recent decades. Consumers' needs and the proportion of consumption spent on individual product groups have also shifted significantly over the years. Consumers' desire for a diverse range of products is constant and is being better and better met. In general, however, the sales channels for flowers and plants are still more diverse and differentiated than in other sectors.

- Urban gardening: Another change in horticulture is the trend towards urban gardening. More and more people in urban areas are gardening in small spaces, be it on balconies, roof terraces or in community gardens. Flowers and plants are no longer just traditionally used in people's own gardens or homes, but are increasingly seen as an important contribution to climate protection as an ecosystem service.

This short list of keywords is not exhaustive, but it shows well the general change and dynamics of the last 40 years in horticulture, which is often described as a conservative market. IPM ESSEN has played a key role in this change. As an industry platform, it has made a significant contribution to networking and exchange among gardeners in Germany, later in Europe and finally worldwide over the last 40 years.

From the outside, IPM ESSEN has acted as a catalyst for change in horticulture since it was founded in the 1980s, initiating or accelerating processes without being included in the end product. Many players in the industry first came together with the opportunities offered by Messe Essen and grew with IPM ESSEN.

Summary and outlook:

Over the past 40 years, IPM ESSEN has made an important contribution to the development of the garden and plant industry. It is not only a platform for the trade, but also a place of inspiration and innovation. The trade fair has great significance for the industry and will certainly continue to play an important role in setting trends and providing new impetus for horticulture.

When IPM ESSEN was founded in 1983, hardly anyone expected that the trade fair would one day establish itself as the world trade fair for horticulture. In retrospect, the goals set were not only achieved, but exceeded. The trade fair format has made a significant contribution to the fact that greenery is increasingly popular and professionally perceived by the public today and that trade visitors can look forward to discovering the latest trends and developments in the industry and exchanging ideas with other experts every year.

Provided that the motto of this year's IPM ESSEN "Our heart beats green" continues to be the guiding principle of Messe Essen's actions in the organization of the trade fair

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format, the previous recipe for success of the International Plant Fair will continue to work and further consolidate IPM ESSEN as the industry meeting of international importance.