

## Dutch participants unanimously positive about Myplant & Garden

The third edition of MyPlant & Garden took place in Milan last week. Dutch participants are unanimously positive about the trade show. The Italian economy seems to be recovering slowly but surely. "Italy's problem is that everyone owes everyone else, and they're all waiting for each other."



The last couple of floricultural fairs in Padua hadn't been great. There wasn't a spring trade show anymore and the one in autumn was struggling. So, the large growers in Italy decided to start a trade fair in Milan. The idea that Italy would no longer have its own floricultural fair in spring was just unacceptable to them.

That's how Myplant & Garden, a show that focuses mainly on garden plants, pot plants and landscaping, was launched three years ago. You might call it a leap of faith. "Initially, I was quite

sceptical. It's so soon after IPM and there's a lot of competition from other fairs", said Charles Lansdorp of the Felini Foundation.

He was at the fair to represent Top Fiori, a Chrysal project focused on promoting the quality of flowers in Italy. Afterwards he said: "It was a good trade show, there was a great atmosphere. I'm glad that someone took the initiative. The Italians need their own fair."

### **Only positive**

With a total of around 25 companies, the Netherlands was well represented on the exhibition floor. And the participants are unanimously positive about the trade show. No matter who you ask. Jacco Huibers of [Amigo Plant](#), Gert van der Schee of [Decorum](#), Frank van der Meer of [Dijk van Dijk](#), Machiel Rijdsdijk of [Kobitex](#), Marco Hartensveld of [Stolk Flora](#) or Patrick Zuidgeest of [Bestplant](#). There was a good crowd, just what the participants are looking for. According to the organisers, there were more than 13,000 visitors, which is around 30% more than last year.

Stolk Flora's Your Natural Orchid received first prize in the category sustainability on day 1, which meant that they attracted even more visitors than normal. "It led to a lot of extra publicity, which is one of the reasons this trade fair was very successful for us. And the number of visitors was excellent", says Hartensveld.

Italy is currently not too important for Stolk Flora. Germany, Belgium and France are much more important. "But we've noticed that Italy is an emerging market, so we'd like to explore it. It would be good if we could respond to the demand through an exporter."

The participants all agree that the quality of visitors was high, too. They got to talk to customers and potential customers. "What was interesting, is that we met end customers here." says Frank van der Meer. Zuidgeest confirms this. Three visiting exporters, Kobitex, [OZ Export](#) and [Hamiplant](#), brought a few end customers along to the Dutch exhibitors' stands.

Zuidgeest: "They are the people who can really give valuable feedback. Which varieties do they like more and which less? Spathiphyllum is very popular in Italy, so it's essential for us to be there. Even if they already know your product – it's all about developing your business relationships."

### **Tough times**

Lansdorp points out that economically, Italy is still struggling. This has an impact on both growers and florists. At the end of the day, flowers are a luxury product. The Italians will buy fewer flowers when they have less to spend. Florists mostly depend on flower sales.

Hundreds of florists who visited the Top Fiori stand, said that times are still tough. Many florists went belly-up during the last couple of years, just like smaller growers who focused on the regional market. It led to an increase in exports from the Netherlands – the export of flowers, plants and garden plants to Italy went up by 2.2% and reached a total of 311 million.

According to Lansdorp, it isn't all the same for flowers and plants. The crisis has had less of an impact on the latter. Most growers would have noticed this, too. Although... During a recent market visit, Frank van der Meer found that garden centres were still struggling.

“The economy isn't shooting up. But it isn't getting worse either, I guess it's stabilising.” Huibers points out that during the crisis, the Italians would buy smaller pot sizes than before. “But the sale of larger pot sizes is going up again at the moment.” Italy is an important market for Amigo Plants, good for 15% of their sales. The coloured echeveria is the most popular product.

### **Emerging**

Hartensveld and Van der Schee also describe Italy as an emerging market. Decorum's trade with Italy is increasing, according to Van der Schee. “That's because Italy is very much a country of labels. Italians love labels and brands and they know Decorum. Our dealers have noticed this, too. Van der Schee did understand however, that the payment periods in Italy are getting longer, which is something that Machiel Rijdsdijk of Kobitex exporters confirms. “The issue isn't that we have to work harder to sell plants. If you've got good quality, it will always sell. But the next step is collecting your money. Italy's problem is that everyone owes everyone else, and they're all waiting for each other. But I can't tell FloraHolland that they'll have to wait for their money. They won't let me purchase anything else.”

This is a problem that all exporters are struggling with, says Rijdsdijk. And it won't be solved for many years. “Exporters who want to enter the Italian market at the moment, will have a hard time. We're fortunate that we have enough regular customers we can count on.”