

# GROWERTALKS

## Features

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## Trial Versus Trial

*Chris Beytes*



In their relatively short six-year existence, the Flower Trials, held in the Netherlands each June, have gained widespread recognition for great displays of innovative marketing programs and the absolute newest in cut flowers, pot plants and bedding plants. The greenhouses and show rooms of the 19 participating companies were packed with industry professionals in the search of new colors, bigger flowers and shorter crop times.

And yet just a few weeks earlier, in late April, the European Pack Trials also highlighted the best of the best for attendees. The main question for all industry players is this: Do we attend Flower Trials or Pack Trials?

FloraCulture International points out the differences and similarities between these two annual events and offers up a selection of new varieties and marketing programs for a taste of what's happening overseas.

### Pack Trials Abroad

The European Pack Trials are the European edition of the California Pack Trials. From a historical point of view, the focus has been on seed, and that's why the European Pack Trials are held in the northern part of the Netherlands, the home of the Dutch flower seed industry. In the beginning, Pack Trials were trials in the real sense of the word, true side-by-side, production-based variety comparisons. But over the decades they have evolved into a marketing show, just as they have in the States. This year nine companies participated.

Founded in 2003, the Flower Trials focus primarily on vegetative flowers and plants and therefore have a stronger presence in the Westland region of Holland, which houses important chrysanthemum breeders such as Fides and Deliflor. There is also a major cut flower presence. Nineteen companies participated, including four that also exhibit at Pack Trials (Ball, Benary, Kieft and Dummen).

Being held in the busy period at the end of April, Pack Trials attract an audience consisting mostly of big seed buyers who are preparing their lists and catalogs for the next season. But for growers, brokers and buyers from garden centers and supermarkets, Pack Trials come during a very busy period. The Flower

Trials come slightly later, which is more convenient for this audience. However, for the flower seed company representatives, the Flower Trials in June are too late.

At this moment the future of the European Pack Trials is under debate. They're under pressure from Fleuroselect members such as Kieft-Pro-Seeds, which is considering the possibility of withdrawing. Recently, Joop Kooijman, account manager at Kieft, said that by participating at the June Flower Trials Kieft reaches a larger audience. He stressed that there is still a need for an additional indoor show for the cool seasons crops such as pansies, bellis and aquilegia, but no longer under the banner of Pack Trials.

As for the Flower Trials, the number of participating breeders is still increasing. "Our main goal is to offer the broadest assortment, bringing together as many companies as possible that are as close to each other as possible," says Jeroen Egtberts, Flower Trials spokesman. He adds that they're negotiating with three German seed companies about participating for the first time next year.

Attendance at the Flower Trials and the European Pack Trials also differ. According to Jeroen, the Flower Trials were attended by a total of about 6,500 visitors, mainly from the Netherlands, Germany, France and the UK, an increase of 20% over last year. Gill Gerken of Ball Horticultural Co. says that their Flower Trial attracts 1,000 to 1,200 attendees over three days compared with about 600 visitors to their Pack Trial, which lasted five days.

Despite all the differences, the primary goal of both events is finding new varieties and new ideas. With that said, here's a selection of offerings from both trials.

A real boost for autumn and winter sales is the heat-tolerant viola Colossus series by **Syngenta**. The flowers of viola tend to become smaller under hot growing conditions. Viola Colossus already has big flowers, up to 4 in., and therefore even in the hottest Mediterranean sun Colossus remains impressive. Five new colors join the series: Rose Surprise (pictured), Pure Rose, Tricolor, White with Purple Wing and Lavender Surprise.

German seed breeder **Benary** held its Flower Trials in the greenhouse of bedding plant grower Peter van der Plas. All the staff dressed up in kangaroo T-shirts, while colorful banners and posters printed with the same funny kangaroo made clear what they were promoting: *Ptilotus exaltatus* Joey. Named for the term Australians use for a baby kangaroo, Joey has large conical spikes of feathery pink flowers, which top the thick silver-green foliage. Joey's short crop time (12 to 16 weeks) allows for quick turns, but the plant needs lots of light and good drainage. No plant growth regulators are needed.

Combinations As of January 1, 2008, **Combiplant**, a producer of young vegetable plants, and Combifleur, a producer of young ornamental plants, joined forces. The two companies continue as one supplier of young plants and cuttings under the shared name of Combinations. Combinations is the leading provider in pot helianthus, with the variety Sunsation as an absolute bestseller. Unlike one of Combination's first pot helianthus, Choco Sun, the F<sub>1</sub> Sunsation is pollen-free so the black heart remains unspoiled. In addition, a pollen-free helianthus has a longer shelf life.

German breeder **Selecta** held its Flower Trials in the floating greenhouse located at the FloraHolland auction in Naaldwijk. Along with a wide range of Flower Power osteospermum, which attracted the attention of the visitors, Selecta also showed the newest zonal geraniums: French Vanilla, a specialty color from the Sunrise

series.

On the marketing side, **Beekenkamp** showed a breakthrough new concept by Bunnik Plants: Takeaway Trends. Takeawaytrends.nl is a multilingual web site for the young consumer of fashionable plants that provides information on plant care and applications. The site lists 50 different flowering and foliage plants for indoor and/or outdoor use. The web site currently represents 33 member growers. Membership can be obtained for a minimum of two years. In the first year, the contribution fee is fixed at €840 (\$1,314), while in the second year the participants pay €300 (\$469). In exchange, the participating growers receive an editorial in four languages, including four photographs. Furthermore, the grower is allowed to mention the web site on pots, sleeves, barcode, tags or labels. Plans for a customized American web site are underway.

**Kieft Seeds** proudly presented its two Fleuroselect Golden Medal winners; *Armeria pseudarmeria* Ballerina White and Ballerina Red. For the first time in Fleuroselect history, two varieties made the judges' Gold Medal honors list for both pack and garden performance. Ballerina Red and Ballerina White perform well in mixed containers, borders and garden edges. Both varieties will flower all summer long, and when the blooms fade away, the rounded dense cushions of growth will remain evergreen throughout the winter. The Ballerina series is suitable for year-round production to different market sectors. The main target for these varieties is the general bedding plant market due to the uniformity, short production time and floriferousness.

**Sahin's** *Digitalis purpurea* Candy Mountain is unique as it's the first upward-facing foxglove from seed. This unusual characteristic enables the gardener to peep inside the stunning rose-pink blooms and view their delightful freckled throats.

Japanese ambassador to the Netherlands, Mr. Minoru Shibuy, visited **Takii's** pack trials and enjoyed the newest blooms from the company. One example is Takii's single-flowered eustoma Vulcan Purple Picotee, which was awarded best market introduction at the Aalsmeer auction in 2007.

**Bodger Seeds** is synonymous with marigolds. Their newest in the Hero series is Orange Bee. This French marigold is characterized by a strong orange-and-red bicolor pattern.

At **Goldsmith Seeds**, Pack Trials attracted more than 500 visitors. The introductions described by Chris Beytes in last month's feature on the California Trials had a similar strong presence here in Europe. The new petunia Picobella series, for instance, is the next generation of milliflora petunias in five colors (Blue, Carmine, Light Lavender, Rose and White) and a mixture that includes Red. Picobella is replacing Fantasy.

**Ball's** theme for the Flower Trials was "Creating Solutions Together." One of the projects on display was Flowers 2impress, which introduces a gift-packaging concept for flowering containers. Sitting in a square waterproof tray that matches the dimensions of CC trolleys, it presents consumers with an easy-to-handle, "great to get, fun to give" product. It's being positioned as an alternative to fresh cut bouquets.

**Dümmen** is continuing to expand its range of presentation concepts following on the successful branding of Potunia in bright green pots. The Confetti Garden concept promotes liners that feature different colors and even different genera rooted together for easy planting of mixed baskets, which can then be complemented by eye-catching pot packaging accessories for strong identification in the market.

**Florema** Young Plants was celebrating its own breeding program for begonias during the Flower Trials. Begonia Waterfall Victoria Falls attracted particular attention with the news that Intratuin garden centers, a Dutch chain, have selected this trailing begonia for its retail stores next year.

**Florist De Kwaker** participated in the Flower Trials for the first time this year. Their new variety selections in the Flori Line pot gerbera assortment were joined by an impressive greenhouse show of 15,000 flowering plants from the new Landscape Gerbera series, currently available in seven colors. Mammoth Cave (pictured) shows off the unique size of the product, which can be placed inside or outside, terrace or border—flowering from spring until the autumn. Promotional activities include a new website, [www.landscapegerbera.com](http://www.landscapegerbera.com), for professionals and consumers.

The first color and best seller in **Royal Van Zanten's** celosia Merida series, Dark Caracas, continues to prove its hardiness and tolerance to transport. It's joined by a new variety, Maripa. Maripa is similarly positioned as a multi-use plant for indoor and outdoor, with a long shelf life.