

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Plenty to Pick From

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Another April, another California Spring Trials, and another batch of, oh, maybe 750 or 1,000 new and improved varieties to evaluate and rank as “must-have,” “worthy-to-try” or me-too. It’s an annual ritual ... actually a perennial, potted plant, woody ornamental and tropical ritual, with some hardgoods thrown in for good measure. Certainly, the California Spring Trials have become more trade show than plant show, but livegoods still dominate, and that’s where we keep our focus.

“We” are the three *GrowerTalks* editors listed above, who spent six 18-hour days hitting nearly every stop to bring you highlights via video, e-newsletter, webinar and—finally—the printed word. We cover as much as humanly possible in those six days and four mediums, but at best, we can only give you the highlights. The rest you’ll have to gather from your seed company sales reps, who are still one of your best sources for new variety info.

- Keep an eye out for the August issue of *GrowerTalks* to see more new varieties from the 2015 California Spring Trials, including perennials, shrubs, potted plants and more!
- Check out all 49 of our Spring Trials videos at <http://tinyurl.com/springtrials2015> to see all of these new varieties for yourself.
- Replay Chris and Ellen’s two Spring Trials webinars to hear their commentary on many of these intros at www.ballpublishing.com/webinars.

How were the trials?

In a word, excellent. California had a fine growing season and the trial plants looked as good as we’ve ever seen. Only at one or two spots did we hear excuses for less-than-perfect or missing plants. But often that was an issue of logistics or shipping, not growing. Attendance was around 1,200 at the largest trials, which is typical.

The mood was also excellent. The season had barely begun when the Trials officially opened April 11 (although we cheated and started the 10th), but already the folks in attendance exuded a positive energy.

Logistically, this was only the second year with no southern trials down in San Diego County, which should have cut several hundred miles and many hours off the trip. Except all those companies from the south moved north, so we spent just as much time visiting them as before. Plus, there are two new stops: Dümmen's second stop, at the BarrelHouse Brewing location; and orchid grower Floricultura, where Beekenkamp, Plug Connection and Westhoff displayed. Plus, several new companies, such as AmeriSeed (pictured). And with just Saturday through Wednesday to see it all ... well, looking at all those flowers becomes almost like work!

What was earth-shaking?

Alas, nothing. Every season, the floriculture world awaits a breakthrough that will make us all rich. That never happens. And even the most talked-about varieties (can you say ptilotus?) often don't convert into big sales. And yet sometimes we miss the breakthroughs. As your scribe wrote in the May Acres & Acres, "When Proven Winners introduced Million Bells Calibrachoa at their debut trial in 1997, I called it 'a petunia look-alike.'" Who knew how big the class would become!

There were plenty of great varieties and amazing colors, but as was also pointed out in that same Acres & Acres, these require retailers to do a good job showing them off to consumers. Otherwise they'll get lost. We call these "endcap" items—meaning they're best displayed front-and-center.

At our count, we've more than 70 varieties on the 13 pages of *GrowerTalks* and *Green Profit* devoted to Spring Trials. There's got to be some horticultural gems among them that will excite your customers and ring your cash register. Start digging!

Unique Intros



Petunia Night Sky (Selecta)

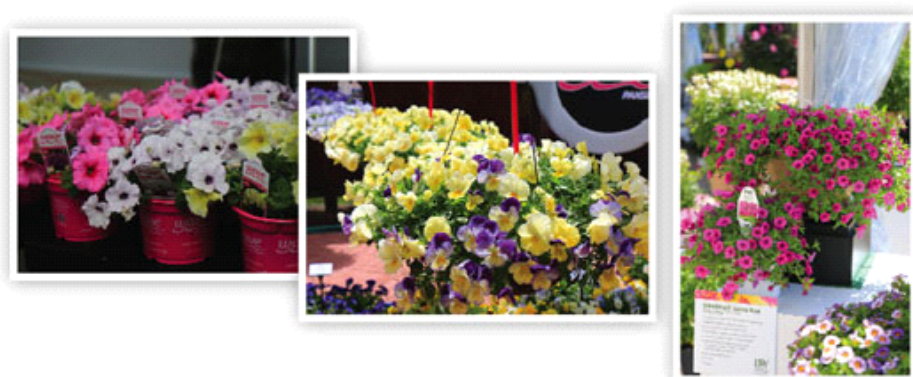
Unfortunately, this is NOT a 2016 intro. It will have a very limited introduction next year, with an eye to a full intro in 2017. It's a new look in petunias: purple with white spots that looked almost like if you splattered bleach on a pair of jeans. The result resembles deep-space constellations as photographed by Hubble. Night Sky is a perfect name. This is definitely an endcap item.

Dahlia Solosister (Dümmen Orange)

Dümmen has some terrific dahlia heritage from their Fides acquisition, such as their Starsister doubles. They're adding to it with Solosister, a new class of dahlias with bicolored single petals, but with a slight variegation. Did we mention it has heat tolerance and it's darn pretty? We can guess that it may have other sister siblings joining it in the future.

Celosia Dragon's Breath (Sakata)

Dragon's Breath is a large *plumosa*-type celosia with enormous deep red plumes that, over time, only get bigger and bigger—like flames. This is one of those end-cap items of which you don't need a whole series or even another color—Red is the perfect color for Dragon's Breath.



Petunia Easy Wave, Shock Wave and Tidal Wave; Pansy Cool Wave (PanAmerican Seed)

Both Shock Wave and Easy Wave get a new unique color: Yellow. Plus, Easy Wave has a new Silver and Pink Passion (pictured, with Easy Wave Yellow), while Tidal Wave adds it's first new color in a few years, Red Velour. Cool Wave Pansies get Blue Skies and Lemon Surprise (the surprise is the occasional purple cap).

Calibrachoa Superbells Garden Rose (Proven Winners)

The folks at Proven Winners called it a “mold breaker for calibrachoa” because this new strain can take a wider range of pH, so they're promoting it for garden beds. Garden Rose was developed by a new breeder and is the first in what will be a line of garden calibrachoa in the future.

New Series



Dianthus Jolt (PanAmerican Seed)

The first heat-tolerant interspecific dianthus from seed, Jolt is stunning in Cherry and Pink (and Pink is an All-America Selections winner). A great knee-high garden plant.

Ipomoea SolarPower (Ball FloraPlant)

There are many of Ball FloraPlant's varieties being promoted as “Season Extenders” for warm-weather

summertime sales, such as their new proprietary ipomoea series called SolarPower, with three colors: Black, Lime and Red. Not groundbreaking, but bred by one of the country's foremost ipomoea breeders and key components to almost every summer container. For instance, the Black variety is said to maintain its strong black color in the heat, rather than turning green or ratty.

New Guinea Impatiens SunStanding (Dümmen Orange)

Bred by Ruth Kobayashi, who's been the poinsettia expert for Ecke for years, this new series of sun-loving NGI has 12 colors, with Aurora-types that have darker petal edges. These varieties have more of a traditional NGI look than SunPatience, they said. Right now, they have limited availability for grower trials, so this series is more of a 2017 introduction.

Gerbera Bengal (Syngenta)

You probably know Syngenta's current Jaguar series, meant for small-sizes pots. Bengal is meant for 6-in. and larger pots. It also has bigger flowers. Six classic, bold colors to start. To get into the jungle spirit of their new Bengal series, Syngenta had a fun photo booth, where we took full advantage of being ridiculous.



Proven Winners had three series that featured brand new genuses for their annuals lineup. **Gerbera Hello!** is a tissue culture series that has that garden gerbera look, with lots of medium-sized flowers on tall stems that are good for cutting. Starts with four colors. **The Dahlia Dahlightful** series has three different semi-double varieties, two of which have dark foliage. And they're introducing **Portulaca Mojave** because customers have been requesting some succulents in the Proven Winners line.

Catharanthus Soiree (Suntory)

What they call a "mini vinca," Soiree has three types under its umbrella: Crown, which includes Crown Pink and Crown Rose, with ridged petals shaped like a queen's crown; Ka•wa•i•i, consisting of Pink, Coral and Lavender that are an extremely compact, micro-blooming vinca that averages less than 10 in. in height and 18 in. in width; Double, which includes Pink and White, with blooms that have two distinct layers of frilly petals.

Salvia Grandstand (Green Fuse)

It's a *splendens*-type salvia, an annual, but it's a vegetative variety, meaning it's more vigorous and floriferous, since it doesn't set seed. Grandstand starts with three colors: Red, Lavender and Purple. There were a couple of nice experimentals, too.



Trifolium Limerick (Ball Ingenuity)

This series includes three colors. Think of it as a “plays-well-with-others” component plant.

Vinca Valiant (PanAmerican Seed)

This mildew-tolerant series is ideal for the landscape and comes in six colors. Nice, upright habit.

Petunia Hells (Westhoff)

They introduced the vivid orange petunia Hells Bells a few years ago and now they’ve got a series with the addition of Hells Fruit Punch (left) and Hells Glow (center). Granted, the name might offend some, but we give Westhoff credit for pushing the envelope. After all, hot sauces can use the word “hell” and a whole lot more.

Impatiens walleriana Lollipop (Benary)

Impatiens ... remember those? Well, Benary does, and even though sales globally are down, they want a piece of what’s left. To that end, Lollipop Impatiens, a true *walleriana*, not a New Guinea or interspecific hybrid. They’ve been planning this for about five years, even hiring a breeder, and feel this is the right time for them. The series is vigorous (they hope vigor will help the plants thrive in the landscape) and starts with seven colors.



Celosia Kelos Fire (Beekenkamp)

This plume-type celosia was tested in Miami in both winter and summer, so you know they can handle the heat and drought. And they’re daylength neutral, too. They have seven colors, with the Purple and Scarlet having darker leaves.

Sakata had two new series that answer the demand for more heat-tolerant plants. **Vinca Vitalia** is an open-pollinated series with nine colors that thrives in the heat and is early to flower. **The Portulaca SunDome series** is called such because it forms a perfect mound around any container. Includes five colors.

The Year of the ...

There were a few crops that we kept seeing over and over throughout the trials.

Marigold

French Marigold Hot Pak (PanAmerican Seed)
African Marigold—Pot-type experimental series (AmeriSeed)
African Marigold Proud Mari (Sakata)
French Marigold Chica (Hem Genetics)
French Marigold Amber Glow and Sunshine (Thompson & Morgan)
African Marigold Savannah (Thompson & Morgan)

Coleus

Flame Thrower and Campfire (Ball FloraPlant)
Flip Side (PanAmerican Seed)
Under The Sea Copper Coral and Fish Net (Hort Couture)
Partytime (Sakata)

Nemesia

Blueberry A La Mode (Hort Couture)
Little Dragons (PlantHaven)
Sunsatia Blood Orange (Proven Winners)

Bidens

Bee Dance (Suntory)
Cupcake (PlantHaven)
Popstar (Cultivaris)
Gold Nuggets (Thompson & Morgan)



Hem Genetics' Joe Messer describes **French Marigold Chica** to Ellen Wells.

Experimental African Marigold series from new Spring Trials participant **AmeriSeed**, a Thailand breeder with a California-based brokerage office.

Coleus Partytime (Sakata)

Coleus Under the Sea Copper Coral (Hort Couture)



Nemesia Little Dragons (PlantHaven)

Nemesia Sunsatia Blood Orange (Proven Winners)

Bidens Bee Dance Painted Red (Suntory)

Bidens Gold Nuggets (Thompson & Morgan)

A+ Additions



Benary had two new of their specialty—begonias. Big Rose Greenleaf is the fifth color in their popular *benariensis* series. **Nonstop Joy Yellow** is the first of a new sub-series with globe-shaped plants not as upright as the traditional Nonstop shape, but it's not trailing, either. Great for a basket or a tall patio container. Makes it easier to ship, too. And **San Francisco** joins their other *boliviensis*-type for heat tolerance and lots of flower power.

Ball Ingenuity had a few exciting new additions, including **Celosia Intenz Dark Purple and Lipstick**, two new varieties that now make this a series of three. Multi-use, too, as they're good for indoor floral, the spring garden, and in the fall with mums and asters. **The Cannova series** of F1 cannas from seed now has

Lemon, a lighter color than yellow, with clear instead of speckled foliage.



Salvia Summer Jewel White (Takii) This *S. coccinea* is an All-America Selections winner ... and so is its two sisters, Summer Jewel Pink and Summer Jewel Red. Can any other series claim the same? Its claim to fame is flowering throughout the season and flowering earlier than other comparisons. Plus, hummingbirds and pollinators love it.

Impatiens SunHarmony White (Danziger) They now have a complete series with the addition of White. And they're not just for full sun; SunHarmony works in the shade under low temperatures, too.

Lobelia Hot Snow (Westhoff) We wouldn't normally get excited over a lobelia, but Hot Snow White is a sister to Hot Waterblue, which we are told is Westhoff's number-one best-selling variety, period. So a white one of equal quality should be a guaranteed "hot" seller.

Petunia Crazytunia (Westhoff) They've gone even crazier with the Crazytunias by adding five new novel colors to the series: Pink Frills, Lucky Lilac, Blackberry Cheesecake, Razzmatazz and Swiss Dancer.



Begonia Bossa Nova (Floranova) Bossa Nova is the *B. boliviensis* from seed they introduced last year. The new colors are Ivory, Pink Glow, Salmon Shades and Pure White, which will probably replace the original White (pictured). Pelleted seed is in the bag.

Gerbera Garvinea (Florist) They've had some great success with their Garvinea line of fast and uniform garden gerberas and have added several new varieties to its subseries. The Classics get a pink named Lydia (pictured); the Sweet subseries of bigger and brighter flowers gets a new yellowy-orange named Sweet Spice; and the Spiders get a dark red, almost Marsala color, named Alexandra.

Angelonia Archangel (Ball FloraPlant) Two new varieties have been added to the series, Light Pink and

Orchid Pink (pictured), that match the rest with bigger flower size and vigorous growth.



Viola Hip-Hop (Hort Couture) New additions to one of their Spring Bling program are part of the Hip Hop series: Raz Bunny, Sunny Bunny and Gold Bunny. Hands, er, paws down, it's the cutest POP out there.

Petunia Surfinia Summer Double Salmon (Suntory) This new addition retains its double flower in the heat and is two weeks earlier to flower than the others in the series.

SunPatiens (Sakata) Five new varieties to the popular series: Compact Pink Coral, Compact Neon Pink, Spreading Lavender, Spreading Clear Orange and Spreading Tropical Orange.

Combo Mambo



MixMasters (Ball FloraPlant) There are 24 total combos in this multi-species cutting program, including new

Flower Child, Eye Caramba and Berry Basket.

Confetti Garden Packs (Dümmen Orange) These are jumbo six-packs that are meant to create DIY combo planters for gardening aficionados. The idea is for growers to direct-stick two each of three different varieties in the pack. This gives the consumer six plants they can plant into a container themselves. All of these combos have been chosen for their exact timing of growth and bloom and the ability to “play well” with each other. They’re starting with six combos in various colors.

Trixi (Selecta) Another multi-species cutting program, Selecta added 11 new mixes this year.



Kwik Kombos, Seedsations and Custom Combos (Syngenta) They conveniently had their combo programs cleverly displayed together. They were promoting heat-loving plants with eight new Kwik Kombos and categorized their Seedsations program by season. And their Custom Combos recipe program featured a lot of geraniums in their new mixes. That's McHutchison's Vaughn Fletcher photographing Kwik Kombo Tutti Frutti Mix; plus SeedSations Mom's Delight Mix.

One Touch (Benary) So named because of its ease for growers and consumers, they've added some new recipe designs to this program that's direct stuck in the final container from 128 plugs after eight weeks. The repeatable designs make it easy to grow and no PGRs or pinching are required. **GT**