

Our Final Day of Spring Trials: Speedling, Benary and Pacific Plug & Liner

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IN THIS EDITION

Speedling (Vista Farms,
Plant Source International,
Thompson & Morgan, Hem
Genetics)
Benary/Volmary
Pacific Plug & LinerBailey
Nursery
Cultivaris

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Day 6

Chris: Well, Ellen, you survived another year traveling and writing and making videos with me ... and videographer extraordinaire Jen Zurko survived it, too. Any comments on our six-day adventure reporting on Spring Trials 2017?

Ellen: Let me point out that it's not over until the end of this email. And it's not just you I have to survive—it's all the food I've shoved in my mouth, too. But boy oh boy, it was good. Diet starts Friday ...

Chris: The Trials do work hard to keep attendees happy and well-fed We could do an entire email just on catering. But when it comes to the Trials themselves—16 stops and 69 exhibiting companies—what takeaway messages do you want to leave our readers?

Ellen: Takeaway messages? I have two: You can't really know about all of the great stuff for your business unless you come out here and see them for yourselves. And you can't really guess what out-of-the-ordinary genus, category or solution to a problem might be the trend during any particular year. For instance, how many calendula intros did we see this year compared to last year? And how many times did we hear, "This variety doesn't flop"? Flopping! It was the issue everyone seemed to be solving this year.

Chris: Nobody wants their plants to flop open. As for my takeaways: A really good year for variety and quality. The California growing season was tough, due to all the rain early in the winter, but nobody had to apologize for their displays. We can't say we found any game-changing intros, but those are a once-a-decade occurrence anyway. I would say the one thing I didn't see was much inspiration for retailers. Some years, I could find some great display ideas to share with garden centers. This year a few, but not many.

Ellen: I agree with that!

Chris: Oh, one last thing before we dive in to today's coverage: I left my one-of-a-kind *GrowerTalks* fleece jacket someplace along the way, maybe at a Trial. If you find it, either sell it on eBay for a high price or ship it postage-collect to me care of Ball and I'll owe you!



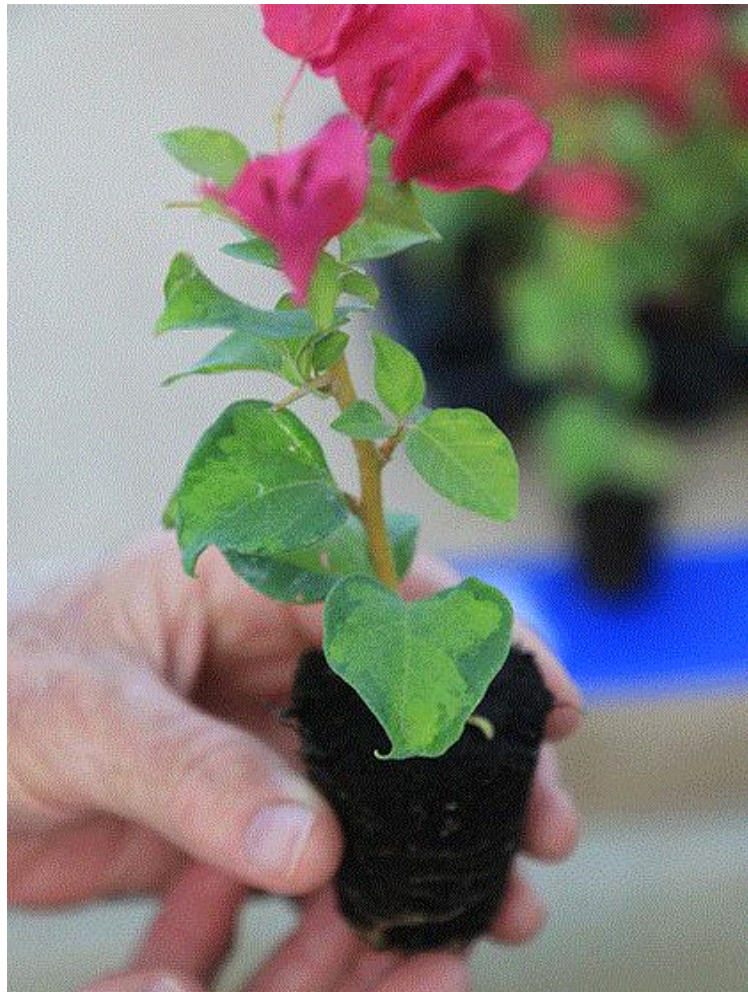
Speedling

Chris: Okay, Ellen, first stop: Speedling, home of five different exhibitors. Pick one and give us your favorite introductions from them.

Ellen: I'll take Thompson & Morgan, if you don't mind. They had several new varieties this year, but I'll pick three. First, *Nasturtium Orchid Flame*—flowers open red and develop a growing yellow throat and whiskers as the flowers age. Real attractive. Second, *Frou Frou*—a new viola series with ruffled edges. And third—calendula! The umpteenth calendula we've seen this year. But *Crown Orange* is slightly different in its double flower and it's upright, 18-in. height, rather than the more rounded habits we've seen so far this year.



Chris: Three of the exhibitors were ABZ Seeds, known for strawberries; Vista Farms, known for bougainvillea; and Plant Source International (PSI), known for ... well, virtually anything you could imagine in open-source, non-patented varieties. ABZ didn't have any new strawberries to show us this year. Vista Farms had one new bougainvillea, Sunstone Red, a sport of the very well known variety Juanita Hatten. Sunstone Red is deep pink like Juanita, but is more free-branching and heavier-blooming. And given the right conditions, it has more variegation than Juanita, too.



Meanwhile, over at PSI, Troy Lucht (clad in the most vivid outfit I've ever seen) has expanded his offering of hедера from three to a dozen, so if you're looking for something nice in the way of ivy cuttings, he might have it.



Ellen: I'll take Hem Genetics to finish off Speedling. Their most important new offering is somewhat of a breeding breakthrough: Limbo picotee petunias. A naturally compact grandiflora petunia with a picotee pattern. They say it's almost like breeding a blue rose! And they brought us three colors: Rose, Burgundy and Red—all picotees, of course.



Also of note is the perennial Supra Pink Dianthus—a 2017 AAS Winner, three new colors in the Mambo multiflora petunias, a wispy *Lavendula multifida* called Blue Torch (just 14 weeks from seed to flower without vernalization!) and a well-branching, naturally compact dusty miller they call Quiksilver.

Chris: I liked the name of their new Corina Viola: Black Eye. Great for Halloween! You can see it and all the other Hem introductions in our [VIDEO](#).



A Sweet Treat



Benary

Chris: Just 30 minutes away from Speedling is Watsonville and Benary's U.S. home. Lots to report here from this German breeding company. The big news, of course, is that they've partnered with German vegetative breeding company Volmary and are going to be selling direct to growers in the U.S. through a new joint venture called Benary+. Quite controversial and the fallout has yet to be determined. Benary says they'll continue to sell through any broker that wants to carry their products; the question is, will the brokers still carry Benary's products if they perceive that Benary is now a competitor? Time will tell. Ellen, tell the folks about the begonia-Silicon Valley connection.

Ellen: Silicon Valley, recognized as the hotbed of global innovation, is just over the hilly ridge north of Watsonville. There's no reason why the technology being developed so nearby can't be applied to what we do in horticulture. And it should be applied—because if we don't, we'll miss the opportunity to engage the Millennial generation and those following behind. With that "Big Begonia Meets Silicon Valley" idea in mind, Benary incrementally made the connection between tech and hort, first with a "virtual reality" bee's-view tour of what we do. Applied examples of tech include QR codes on seed packages that allow growers to check up-to-date germ rates; self-watering flower pots that can be controlled by an app and flower-buzzing mini drones! Tech, Chris! You gotta welcome it, my friend.

Chris: Tech I'm fine with, but virtual reality makes me woozy. But the ride over Watsonville in the real helicopter was awesome!



On to varieties

Chris: But on to varieties. Not a ton new in seed varieties, but there were a few good ones. Such as Begonia Big Red Green Leaf. Pretty self-explanatory. Last year, Nonstop Begonia got a new subcategory called Joy, which has a sort of a globe shape that's good for baskets; Joy Mocca White is a dark-leaved Joy with white flowers. Success petunias get three new colors: Yellow Chiffon, Pink Star and Purple (pictured). And there's a first-ever-from-seed calocephalus called Bed Head.



Ellen: We next got led over to another greenhouse filled with products from their new partner, Volmary. Chris, you're old ... I mean, you've been around a long time. What's your take on the Volmary genetics?

Chris: Experienced, Ellen, experienced. All I know is, they showed about 150 items out of the 450 that they've picked to offer to North America, so they've probably got virtually everything everybody else has. It's all proprietary genetics. Cuttings come from Kenya at the former Goldsmith facility. And they say they've done shipping tests to make sure all offerings will get from there to here in good shape. A quick walk through the house showed a few things we didn't see anywhere else this year, such as heliotrope and *Salvia farinacea*. Will it get any traction in the market? Like I said at the beginning, time will tell. Want to see all sorts of great Benary stuff, including VR, helicopter rides and varieties? Watch our video [HERE](#).



Okay, Ellen, around the corner to the very last stop of our 2017 tour, Pacific Plug & Liner.

Ellen: Right! And to a stop with a definite theme: perennials. They've been focusing on perennials and specialty items for the past year and a half. And even though we might not realize it, Central California is cool and mild—a great place for perennial propagation. April Herring-Murray and colleague Brandi transformed PP&L into “Camp Perennial” for Trials this year, converting the greenhouse into eight separate “campsites.” Such creative minds, I tell you. Each highlighted a perennial crop: hydrangeas, strawberries, lavender, hellebores, grasses, etc.



Chris: They did a good job showing their offerings. For instance, who knew PP&L offered 120 different dianthus in three liner sizes? This stop had more good retail display ideas than any other ... heck, maybe more than all the others combined. April went overboard. Oh, and sorry about blowing my camp counsellor whistle in your ear.

Ellen: I've got very sensitive ears, Chris.

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Echibeckia

Chris: So we found out! PP&L's trial was more focused on showing their catalog of offerings than showing new offerings, but there were a few. Most notable was echibeckia—that unusual cross between echinacea and rudbeckia. It gets three new colors: Electra Shock, Pumppernickel and Butterscotch Biscuit. The latter is easy to describe: bright yellow. The first two, well, you just need to see the photo. Interesting, to say the least! You can also see them in our video [HERE](#).



Ellen: And in the grasses category they have two new carexes: Ribbon Falls—a pure green leaf—and Feather Falls—variegated. Each are great in a wide range of temps, grow no more than 24-in. tall, and are ready in just eight to 10 weeks. Bred by Bart Noordhuis, the same fellow who bred Echibeckia.

Chris: A talented guy! You may have attended our hybrid hellebores webinar in which he was our expert (yes, he breeds hellebores, too).



Bailey Nurseries

Chris: Next company at PP&L this year was Bailey Nurseries. A big display showing all their existing brands, but amongst that we spotted two fresh introductions. There's a new gardenia called Sweet Star, featuring single, creamy white flowers with plenty of great gardenia fragrance. It's Zone 7, so a patio plant for many of us. Also new is a deciduous azalea called Electric Lights (pictured below). The first of a series, it features pink double flowers. It's a Zone 4 shrub.



Ellen: Next—and the very last exhibitor in our 2107 Spring Trials coverage—is Cultivaris. Josh Schneider covered a lot (per usual), so I'll cover just a few. Like Lamium Hanky Panky—much more vigorous than the traditional White Nancy, with lots of silver leaves and large pink flowers (pictured); Sedum Chocolate Cherry—chocolate leaves and cherry-colored flowers; Coreopsis Solar Dance—a grandiflora type with sterile flowers blooming May-November; Geranium Bloom Time from tissue culture, whose bloom time is “all the time” (to quote Josh) ... what else, Chris?



Global Breadfruit

Chris: Always a diverse and eclectic batch of offerings from Josh and Cultivaris. I might mention his heuchera series Baby Bells, which comes from cuttings rather than TC, for a quality input at a lower cost. I also commend Josh and his partner Gary Grueber for Global Breadfruit, an initiative to provide breadfruit trees to as many countries as possible. Breadfruit is one of the most useful, productive and healthy foods you can imagine—high in protein, nutrients and fiber, and easy to grow. He gives tissue culture producer AG3 credit for providing young plants. So far, Global Breadfruit has planted 150,000 trees in 46 countries. It's somebody from our industry who's working to feed hungry people around the world. I love it and we all should get on board.

Ellen: Doing good and giving back—just like I've been promoting in *buZZ* each week, Chris! We should all consider how we can give back to our communities—whether it's locally or globally.

Woo-hoo!!!

Speaking of giving back, I'm looking forward to getting back ... getting back home, that is. This being our last day, we are outta here tomorrow. Woo-hoo!!! Thanks, Chris, for inviting me here yet again this year. It's been ... a pleasure.

Chris: Ditto! Now, dear reader, thanks for sticking with us for these six days. If you've got comments or questions, email either of us—you can click our names at the bottom. Thanks to those who've told us our musings are useful; we try hard to give you a taste of Spring Trials since you're too busy to get out here yourself.

So on behalf of Ellen, videographer extraordinaire Jen Zurko and myself, we'll see you next year! (Actually, we'll see you next week in our regular emails, *Acres Online* and *buZZ*!)

Jen: Hey, don't sign off on my behalf! I want to say something. That is, click [HERE](#) to watch the "Bobblehead Bloopers" video I've pulled together. It'll give you a good idea of what I've had to put up with all week.

Now we can say, "See you next year!"

Chris and Ellen

Handwritten signatures of Chris and Ellen in black ink.

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