

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Spring Trials: What We Saw

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“So what have you seen?” That’s the question of the day, every day, during the California Spring Trials. And when it’s asked of a journalist who is paid (and, hopefully, experienced enough) to know wheat from chaff, the answer is important. After all, at least a thousand new and improved varieties are displayed by the 50-plus companies that exhibit. If a variety stands out enough to be remembered by the most critical observer, it must be something special!

That’s what we three editors spend six days hunting for: That rare variety that combines 55-mph color, marketing pizzazz (a clever name never hurts), and grower- and retailer-friendly characteristics. Hit two of the three and you’ve got a winner; hit all three in one variety and you’ve got a new market leader. Those come along about once a decade—think Majestic Giant Pansy, Wave Petunia, Calliope Geraniums, SunPatiens.

Alas, the 2016 Spring Trials didn’t produce anything of that caliber, but that doesn’t mean we couldn’t answer the above question. Our answers are below, broken out into several categories, including Memorable Intros, New Series, A+ Additions and more.

On a Scale of 1 to 10 ...

... We’d rate the trial year a 7.5, based on a few factors: 1) There were no groundbreaking intros and only a handful (seven, by our count) of what we’d call “memorable” ones; 2) Clever ideas suitable for stealing by growers or retailers were few and far between; 3) Trends, such as edibles and succulents, were decently, but not abundantly represented; and 4) Quality of the plants on display was excellent; the California growing season seemed to be a good one.

One thing that always scores 10 out of 10 in California is the networking. This year’s crowd numbered 1,100 or so, down somewhat from peak years when 1,500 or so made the trip, but that’s in large part to the beginning-of-April timing and the consolidation of the industry. The greatest challenge facing attendees is fitting in time to stop and chat. With 18 stops and close to 60 exhibiting livegoods and hardgoods companies to see in just five days, idle industry gossip is kept to a minimum.

With the exception of “So, what have you seen?” of course.

Memorable Intros



Lupine Staircase (Green Fuse)

Although these plants were displayed off to the side and weren't being "officially" launched, many trial-goers were talking about them. This Zone 3 perennial will be offered as liners from tissue culture (at least to start). That means stronger, more disease-resistant plants than the seed-

propagated kind. Stalks are strong and filled with beautiful rows of bright solid and bicolor flowers. They have a few more details to work out regarding culture, but they do know they're quick to color once the stems emerge.

Salvia VIBE Ignition Purple (PlantHaven)

This salvia comes from a species none of us had heard of, *x jamesensis*. Amazing electric purple-blue flowers on a pleasantly green plant—and no stickiness on the foliage like other salvia. The breeder—a former tech industry exec turned breeder—is working on other colors, including Fire Engine Red, so look for more to come.

Petunia Surfinia Heartbeat (Suntory)

That cute heart-shaped pink design is dependent on fertility and temperature. Grow cool and with moderate fertility and that heart shape will be perfect. A little off on either side and the pattern will be weak or bleed out too much. We think this variety will do really well at retail, too.



Salvia Summer Jewel Lavender (Takii)

This All-America Selections winner is the fourth color in the series (joining Red, White and Pink), and the fourth AAS winner. We don't think any other series can claim such accolades.



Petunia Limbo Heather's Mix (Hem)

A traditional, non-trailing seed series, many growers like Limbo's habit and color range. And Disney does, too. That may be one reason Hem surprised long-time Disney horticulturist Heather Will-Browne with a Limbo mix named

for her: Heather's Mix, a combo of Limbo Violet and Limbo Rose. In addition, Limbo gets three new colors: Mid Blue, Sky Blue and Burgundy.

Geranium Calliope Medium and Large (Syngenta)

Calliope Dark Red is possibly the best-selling geranium today, but it's got one flaw: it's not good for small pots. The solution? Calliope Medium Dark Red, the foundation of a new Calliope series that meets the grower's need for a do-it-all geranium good for everything from 4.5-in. to 12-in. pots. It's got smaller foliage, takes up less bench space, needs half the PGRs of Calliope and blooms 10 days earlier. Otherwise, it looks the same. Three former Calliopes are also now Calliope Mediums and there are two more new ones in addition to Dark Red: Medium Scarlet and Medium Pink Flame. The last part of the change is that the original Calliope series is now called Calliope Large. Karl Trellinger tells us there's a whole raft of new breeding

coming out next year. Stay tuned!

Begonia Funky Pink (Benary)

An aptly named hybrid hanging basket begonia that has both single and double flowers in shades of pink. Being a hybrid makes it tough, its tuberosa blood gives it double flowers and the potential for great colors; and its boliviensis blood gives it good heat tolerance. Expect future Funkys.

New Series



Begonia Megawatt (PanAmerican Seed)

A big, burly interspecific series that's sort of like a mounded Dragon Wing Begonia, Megawatt blooms several weeks earlier and is less long-day sensitive. The series comes in two bronze-leaf colors (Pink, Rose) and two green-leaf colors (Rose, Red).

Bacopa MegaCopa (Ball FloraPlant)

Ideal for baskets, this sutera has flowers as large as any on the market. This four-color series, which replaces the Abunda series, has tremendous heat tolerance.

Nemesia Momento (Green Fuse)

Unlike some other nemesias on the market, Steve Jones said that this one "doesn't get crazy" because it has a tamer habit. Comes in two colors: Burgundy Frost and White.

Geranium Brocade (Dümmen)

Shown as a pre-introduction last year, the Brocades are fancy-leafed geraniums with dark and interesting zone patterns, deep lobes and nice flowers, although not as floriferous as a modern zonal. There are four colors, three of which are double flowered and two of which are AAS winners (Fire and Cherry Night).



Dahlia Labella Grande (Beekenkamp)

It's big no matter how you look at it: large series with lots of colors (12 in all), large flowers and large overall plant compared to others on the market.

Gerbera Majorette (Sakata)

This new series was bred in Denmark. After all, that's where Daehnfeldt, the company Sakata bought quite a few years ago, was based. And Daehnfeldt bred the Festival Gerberas. Majorette has large flowers, and plenty of them, is uniform, and has tidy foliage that doesn't get "cabbagey." The series starts with eight colors.

Gazania Enorma (Hem)

Bred for the serrated leaves that first appear, this series is ideal for plug growers and includes six colors and a mix. One fact about gazania that Joe Messer told us that we didn't know: the flowers will also close when it's hot and humid out—not just at nightfall—to protect the pollen.



Canna Toucan (Proven Winners)

This seed series is quick to flower (within two months) and includes four colors: Red, Rose, Scarlet and Yellow.

Snapdragon Snaptastic (Syngenta)

We were told it's "truly intermediate" or a "mega-dwarf," as the breeder calls it. It's a cross of what makes the old Arrow series tall and what makes the Montego series short. The result is a 14- to 16-in. tall center spike with multiple secondary branching, which fills in like crazy. And it's day neutral, which opens up the production for multiple seasons of production. They have five colors (Orange, Magenta, Yellow, Pink and Red) and a mix.

Petunia Amore (Danziger)

These are brightly colored and patterned versions of their Ray series. Habit is mounding and the colors—Queen of Hearts (which has a heart pattern), Joy, Mio and Fiesta—are stable.

A+ Additions



Canna Cannova Orange Shades, Mango (Ball Ingenuity)

They've added two new varieties to their line of Cannova Cannas, the first F1 canna from seed, bringing the line to seven colors total.

Angelonia Archangel Cherry Red (Ball FloraPlant)

The first-ever red angelonia on the market. A great color on a great plant. They also have a new Blue Bicolor.

Purslane Hot Shot Flambeau Rose (Green Fuse)

A great plant for southern conditions, Flambeau Rose has green and white variegated foliage. But at times it's almost a tricolor because under dry growing conditions it also gets a pink hue. Growers don't necessarily grow dry, but that's likely how it'll end up in consumers' yards.



Scaevola Surdiva Blue Violet, Light Blue, Fashion Pink (Suntory)

Surdiva's new breeding makes the plant tighter with flowers nearly floating on top of the foliage. The three new colors all have this habit and improvements to colors will move in this direction, as well. Bonus is we got to meet the breeder, too.

Patio Gerbera Garvinea Glacier, Kruger, Fundy (Florist)

Named after famous national parks around the world, the newer ones in the patio line are a bit quicker to grow than the older assortment by a few weeks. Plus, the flower size is bigger. And we saw a few experimentals that will be coming down the pipeline in the next year or so.



Begonia Unbelievable Tweetie Pie (Dümmen)

Last year, they introduced Unbelievable First Kiss. This year, they have a striking yellow with a really cute name.

Petunia Crazytunia Frisky Purple, Citrus Twist, Maniac Lilac (Westhoff)

Three new eye-catching flower color patterns have been added to their unique lineup.

SunPatiens Compact Fire Red, Compact Tropical Rose, Compact Orchid, Spreading Pink Kiss (Sakata)

Sakata was celebrating SunPatiens' 10th birthday with a giant birthday cake. (Unfortunately, it wasn't edible.) Alecia Troy listed the data for us: eight years in the making, 10 years on the market, 27 colors and four new ones: three compacts (Compact Tropical Rose has variegated foliage) and one spreading. There's no reason to think the series won't remain strong for another 10 years.



Begonia Santa Barbara (Benary)

This variety is a white boliviensis that joins Santa Cruz and San Francisco. All of these are from seed.

Argemone White Butterfly (Proven Winners)

In 1992, Proven Winners introduced Butterfly, which was very popular, and then Vanilla Butterfly. Using genetics from the original, they've added this white one 16 years later.

Calibrachoa Superbells Coralina, Morning Star, Hollywood Star (Proven Winners)

They're doing some serious upgrades to all the colors; this year gets Grape Punch Improved (much larger flowers, less pH sensitivity), Yellow Improved (tighter branching for more flowers), Red

Improved (four weeks earlier) and a Tequila Sunrise that's so improved it's now called Tropical Sunrise. Oh, there are also three new ones: Coralina (coral colored), Hollywood Star (hot pink with a star) and Morning Star (light pink with a star).



Petunia Picasso In Purple (Proven Winners)

The pattern is similar to Pretty Much Picasso, but with purple and more of a trailing habit.

Petunia Cascadias Rim Cherry, Rim Fantasy (Danziger)

These are the picotee— or hula-hoop—type of petunias, which are a very important crop in the U.S. They're breeding for stable colors and weather tolerance, and will produce a premium product.

The Year of the ...



Dianthus

Dianthalot series (Selecta)
(pictured)

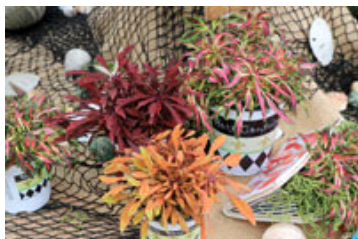
Constant Beauty Garnet and Cadence series (Green Fuse)
Pinball Wizard (PlantHaven)

Scent From Heaven (Kiwi Flora)

Kahori Scarlet, White Experimental (Dümmen)

Sunflor Megan, Amber (Hilverda Vooij)

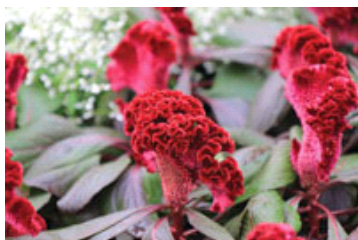
Spiked Punch, Black Cherry Frost, Paint The Town series (Proven Winners)



Coleus

Ruby Slipper, French Quarter, Inferno (Ball FloraPlant)
Under the Sea Sea Urchin, Sea Monkey sub-series (Hort Couture)
(pictured)

Copinto series (PAC)



Celosia

Twisted Orange (Ball Ingenuity)
Dracula (PanAmerican Seed)
(pictured)

Paleo, Flirt Lime, Hot Topic (Royal Van Zanten)

Kelos Atomic (Beekenkamp)

Mix It Up

Fuseables (PanAmerican Seed)

PanAmerican's combo program from pelleted seed has four new additions—one with all Wave Petunias called Rise 'N Shine, two cool-season ones with violas called Sunset Boulevard and Sunglow, and the first all-calibrachoa mix called Paradise Island.

(The purple denim is only available in this mix, not separately.)



Combos from Suntory

Three new combo ideas: Bee Gorgeous, which includes Bidens Beedance Red Stripe; and two with Million Bells Trailing Lobelia—Sunny Skies and Spring Marvel.

Mingle With Garvinea (Florist)

Florist isn't selling specific gerbera combos, but they were showing a new concept they called "Mingle With Garvinea" to give growers and retailers ideas on how they can use gerberas in combinations with annuals, grasses and more.



Confetti (Dümmen)

As always, Dümmen introduced new liner mixes to their popular Confetti line. This year, their focus was to add more yellows to their combinations, along with a few single-genera mixes with coleus and calibrachoa. Plus, they're doing more consumer-facing marketing with new retail POP and a new website.

Celosia as thrillers (Beekenkamp)

Kind of along the same line as what Florist did with gerbera, Beekenkamp was showing spicata-type celosia as a "thriller" in combos. Much more interesting than traditional dracaena spike.

SunPatiens (Sakata)

To help celebrate its 10th Anniversary, Sakata created some SunPatiens mixes, including this one called Best Friends.