

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Channeling New Varieties

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California Spring Trials reminds us a little of the common complaint about modern television: “Five hundred channels and there’s nothing on!” At Trials, attendees get to see hundreds and hundreds of colorful introductions over five or six long days, and yet at the end of it all, they often say to us, “Where’s the excitement, where’s the sizzle, where’s the wow?”

Of course, that’s a gross overstatement. There’s plenty of new stuff, and some of it is really good. We blame the blasé attitude on two factors: First is “the paradox of choice,” wherein the more choices you have, the less satisfied you are with them. Frankly, many of us are spoiled and jaded about the amazing selection of plants on the market. The second factor is distractions. As with TV analogy, there are plenty of good shows on; it’s simply challenging to find the winners among the reruns and infomercials. So it is with Spring Trials: The gems are there, but they’re not always obvious at first glance. There are some 60 exhibitors, and if each has, say, 10 new items, that’s 600 intros to sort through (and many companies have more). No wonder eyes start to glaze over on day five!

All that said, our job is to surf every channel, er, trial to find you the best of the best of the new introductions. This year, we’ve got them in a wide range of categories, from hybrid forms of American natives and components that climb, to normally upright plants that trail and, of course plenty of Technicolor flowers.

Stay tuned for the August issue of *GrowerTalks* to see more new varieties from the 2017 California Spring Trials, including perennials, shrubs, potted plants and more.

If you’d rather watch or listen, visit our YouTube channel and enjoy the more than 40 videos we shot as we went from stop to stop. <http://tinyurl.com/springtrials2017>

You can also replay our two Spring Trials webinars, in which Chris and Ellen go through the highlights of what we saw. www.ballpublishing.com/webinars.



- Ball FloraPlant's Kris Carlsson shows off SolarTower ipomoea.
- A table set with Hort Couture's offerings. Note the pallet "chandeliers."
- Succulent volcano put together by HMA (Horticultural Marketing Associates).



- Herb retail display concept at Dümmer Orange.
- Syngenta hired a company called Schipper Designs to design this striking art work, which was crafted, we are told, by the same person who used to do similar signage for Whole Foods. Best signage of the Trials.



- Jen and Ellen take their first-ever helicopter ride, courtesy of Benary (now known as Benary+ in the U.S. and Canada, as they begin to sell direct to growers).
- April Herring of Pacific Plug & Liner creates some of the most colorful and creative displays at Spring Trials. This year's theme: "Camp Perennial."
- We thought these clever All-America Selections signs were brand new. Turns out they're old. Bring 'em back, Diane!
- Troy Lucht's annual outfit (sourced from Loudmouth.com) has become as much of a must-see as anything else at Trials.

Memorable Intros



Sunflower Sunfinity (Syngenta)

Sunfinity, a multi-blooming hybrid sunflower, is definitely not your run-of-the-mill cut or pot sunflower. It was one of the most-talked-about introductions on the coast. It's sterile, producing little or no pollen, and as such, keeps blooming a lot longer. Culturally, you'll want to give it a pinch—or two or three—to yield more branches and more blooms.

No other hybrid sunflower (and this is an interspecific hybrid, they tell us) offers quite the show of flowers as Sunfinity, so Syngenta is encouraging growers and retailers to get top dollar by asking top dollar themselves—10 times more than what you might pay for a typical sunflower seed or plug, they say. Suggested retail price is \$15 and up. We asked if they'd gotten pushback from customers on the pricing. Surprisingly, it's not big growers who are bothered, but small ones, they say.

Don't plant this in a 4-in. pot! Syngenta has 2.5-qt. and 1.5-gal. branded pots available—not required, but the larger size helps you achieve the price point you need. A tag is required.

New Guinea Impatiens Wild Romance (Dümmen Orange)

Wild Romance was the star of their trials—the first variety we saw when we entered the greenhouse at Edna Valley Vineyard (where they hold their trials). Wild Romance is a true New Guinea, not an interspecific hybrid, so it's intended for full shade. It's a semi-double, with big flowers that open from a rose-shaped bud. It starts with just two colors, White and Blush Pink. When open, the white flowers, contrasting against the dark green foliage, almost resemble a gardenia. And the plants and flowers are both big—this is definitely a premium item! They say plenty of other colors are in the pipeline.

Osteospermum Bright Lights Double Moonglow (Proven Winners)

Size-wise, Double Moonglow is a monster! But in a good way. And something we didn't think about: because it's a double flower, the flowers don't close at night as with typical osteos. There's just too much stuff in there to close up. As for the color, it's about the same hue as a warm full moon.



Ipomoea SolarTower (Ball FloraPlant)

Here's a tall plant for you: Ipomoea SolarTower. You know BFP's SolarPower series? Well, picture that but climbing instead of cascading and you get the idea of SolarTower, which they say is the first-ever climbing ipomoea. A fast grower, SolarTower is great for trellises and obelisks, and allows for a premium price at retail. Comes in two colors, Lime and Black.

Begonia Nonstop Joy Mocca White (Benary)

Nonstop is to begonias what Kleenex is to tissues and Xerox is to copying. Which is why any introduction is a guaranteed sale. Last year, Nonstop 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.

Petunia Headliner Pink Sky (Selecta One)

The big story last year at Selecta One was Night Sky, that rich purple and white petunia that looks like the view through the Hubble telescope. This year, Night Sky gets a sister, Pink Sky; both get added to the Headliner petunia series. Headliner also gets several nice "swirl" colors, including Banana Cherry, Blueberry and Blackberry.

Verbena Obsession Cascade (Syngenta)

Obsession is Syngenta's spreading F1 seed verbena series; Cascade, obviously, is a cascading version. Now, we're hardly verbena experts, but Obsession Cascade is hard to tell from a vegetative verbena; certainly, the average consumer won't know the difference. It looks great in combos with other premium seed items. In fact, they've added it to their Seedsations seed combos. The series starts with five colors, including a nice Twister Violet bicolor.



Salvia Mystic (Ball FloraPlant)

Salvia Mystic Spires gets a new "little sister" you might say. Named Mystic, she's about 30% smaller than Mystic Spires. With its more controlled habit, Mystic is great for summer combinations.



Phlox F1 Popstars (Floranova)

The first F1 phlox with a star-shaped flower, says Floranova (21st Century is the only other F1 phlox on the market.) All six colors take the heat well and have strong disease resistance. Flowers 12 weeks from sowing.

African Marigold Cheerleader (Floranova)

Cheerleader is Floranova's first dwarf African marigold. First point to know about it is the secondary flush of flowers comes up fast and keeps the plant flowering. It's been proven in summer trials, too. Three colors: Gold, Yellow and Orange.

Lantana Bloomify (Ball FloraPlant)

Bloomify has been verified as sterile by the University of Florida—that means it doesn't set seed, so it stays in bloom all summer long, and it can get around any invasive species restrictions. The series starts with two colors: Bloomify Red and Bloomify Rose.



Pentas Lucky Star (PanAmerican Seed)

Lucky Star's breeder, Jason Jandrew, told us his goal was to produce a compact pentas that's not a me-too. He says Lucky Star offers three benefits over the competition: 1) It's four to six days faster to finish; 2) its secondary flowers come on fast, which gives the plant continuous color; and 3) there are some good, bright colors, especially Violet, which is both deep and vivid. Oh, and they showed some actual side-by-side pack comparisons of Lucky Star vs. the competition in packs—in other words, "pack trials!" Ha!

Bracteantha Hello (Cohen)

Bred by well-known Israeli breeder Breier, Hello looked to have good uniformity in habit, but with a variety of flower shapes and sizes. Cohen has picked out six colors thus far, but showed lots of experimentals, from which they'll be selecting more additions



Trailing Coleus Great Falls (Dümmen Orange)

Truly cascading, these coleus expand your palette of trailing products for baskets and containers. There are four varieties in the series, all named after waterfalls of the world. Pictured: Niagara and Angel.

Petunia Main Stage (Selecta One)

A new vigorous petunia series, Main Stage replaces Selecta's Famous series. Compare this one to Surfinia and Supertunias. It has 10 colors, some of which are former Famous colors.

Osteospermum Daisy Falls (Selecta One)

Daisy Falls is a true trailing osteospermum that's received a "huge" reception wherever it's been tested, we were told. Daisy Falls starts with three colors: White Amethyst, Pink and Purple. There are doubles in the pipeline, and also yellows.



Snapdragon F1 Crackle & Pop (Floranova)

Snap(dragon) Crackle & Pop—get it? Sure, the name is awesome, but it's a good series of eight colors: early flowering, uniformly matched, with well-branched and strong stems. A model pack series.

Petunia Constellation (Westhoff)

One can't ignore the fact that Westhoff has come out with the first competitor to petunia Night Sky. Westhoff offers three colors, each with a constellation name: Aries is purple, Gemini is violet and Virgo is dark blue. Each seemed to have a slightly different sky pattern. How production regime and environment impact the pattern will have to be determined by grower trials.

Snapdragon Candy Tops (Sakata)

Sakata has introduced a series that fits between their compact Floral Showers and knee-high Sonnets: Candy Tops. Its claim to fame is less apical dominance, they say, with secondary flowers that come on quickly for plenty of color. The series starts with five colors.



Portulaca Pazzaz Nano (Danziger)

Despite the “nano” name implying “small,” all four colors in Danziger’s new portulaca series have large flowers. The interesting thing is these flowers don’t seem to close! Danziger’s Mike Fernandez tells us he’s gone into the greenhouse at 5:30 a.m. and the flowers were wide open. We were looking at them at 4:30 p.m. and they were still wide open. Why don’t they close? Mike says the breeders chalk it up to good genetics.

Calibrachoa Cruze Control (Green Fuse)

This is an upgrade of the Cruze series, but while more controlled in habit, don’t view it as compact or dwarf—it maintains Cruze’s large flowers. Company owner Steve Jones says he likes “homeowner habit” in his offerings and Cruze Control is still big and showy. The series has 13 colors, including Grape Delicious (Delicious being Green Fuse’s designation for flowers with eyes).

Dahlia LaBella Maggiore (Beekenkamp)

This Dutch breeder has four different sizes of dahlia series under the La Bella family name. From small to large: Piccolo, Medio, Grande and, brand new for this year, La Bella Maggiore. It’s big! For 8- or 10-in. pots. The series starts with six colors, including two bicolors.



Canna Cannova Bronze Orange (Ball Ingenuity)

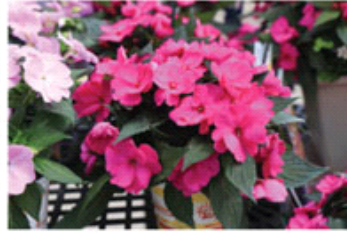
Scarlet Bronze Leaf is the most popular in the series, so Ball Ingenuity was happy to introduce another dark-leaved variety to this F1 seed canna series.

Petunia Surfinia Trailing Red (Suntory)

Trailing Red has a slightly lighter, brighter red than Surfinia Dark Red, along with a fuller habit and more of the classic petunia “architecture” that folks are looking for. With that habit and color, it’s a winner for basket, pot, landscape.

Petunia Potunia Starfish, Cherish (Dümmen Orange)

Additions to the popular Potunia series includes a deep watery purple-blue with a white star (Starfish) and a cherry color (Cherish).



Zinnia Profusion Red (Sakata)

To help celebrate their 40th anniversary in the U.S., Sakata's first surprise was yet another Profusion Zinnia All-America Selections winner, Profusion Red. Haven't they had Red before, you ask? No, you're thinking of Profusion Cherry. This is more of a scarlet red. Since Cherry and Orange earned their AAS awards in 1999, the series has earned six more AAS awards.

SunPatiens Compact Purple (Sakata)

The Compact subseries of SunPatiens features 16 colors now (at least by our count). Interestingly, they've applied for a utility patent for this plant, for future protection of the variety and its novel traits.

Petunia Evening Scentsation (Takii)

First, it's blue. Okay, not blue-blue, but as mauve blue a petunia as we've ever seen. Second, it's got a lovely fragrance, said to offer "notes of hyacinth, sweet honey and rose." It's a stand-alone variety, as we think it should be—this is an endcap item! Evening Scentsation earned an AAS Regional Award for 2017 (Heartland, Great Lakes, West/Northwest).



Calibrachoa Superbells Doubles (Proven Winners)

If you know plant patents, you know that there's only one company, Selecta One, that can sell double calibrachoa in the U.S. But Proven Winners struck a deal with Selecta One that lets them do so, too. (We were told they've reciprocated with their calibrachoa star pattern, so it's a win-win.) Intros include Double Ruby (pictured) and Double Orchid. New colors in Superbells singles include Blue Moon Punch, Rising Star, Hot Pink, Over Easy Improved and White Improved.

Calendula Lady Godiva Orange (Proven Winners)

Lady Godiva's a double, and she's got a bit of a cascading habit, too. But even so, she stays controlled. You might say she could even pass on the growth regulators. Will we see a Lady Godiva in Yellow? We hope so.

Geranium Calliope Medium (Syngenta)

Last year, Syngenta added a less vigorous version of Calliope called Calliope Medium, and renamed the

original Calliope Calliope Large. This year, Medium gets five new colors: Burgundy, Red, Deep Rose, Violet and White. We saved White for last because it's the first White in the Calliope series. And conveniently, size-wise it fits between Medium and Large, so you can grow it with either series. Meanwhile, Calliope Large gets Salmon and Magenta.



Petunia Success (Benary)

The Success trailing seed petunia series gets three new colors: Yellow Chiffon, Pink Star and Purple. Success was bred in the Netherlands under low light and selected for uniformity and performance, so as a grower you can grow all of the colors in the series the same and bench-run them when done.

Petunia Limbo (Hem Genetics)

Their most important new offering is somewhat of a breeding breakthrough: a picotee pattern in their naturally compact Limbo grandiflora petunia series. They say it's almost like breeding a blue rose! And they brought us not one but three picotees: Rose, Burgundy and Red.

Petunia Cascadia (Danziger)

This series gets five new colors: Purple Gem, Red Lips, Iceberg, Passion and Blue Omri. Most important are Red Lips, which is a clean, bright red. Iceberg is a clear white with no sign of blushing. And Purple Gem is a star-patterned novelty that's stable and stands up to the weather.



Bidens Beezar (Kientzler)

Bidens Funny Honey is one of the plants in the two-variety Beezar series from Kientzler. Aside from its awesome name, Funny Honey (shown off by Andreas Kientzler) has an orange and smoky yellow flower with an almost painted appearance. The other one is called Fire Wheel (modeled by Ellen).

Bidens Beedance Yellow (Suntory)

This is the second year that Suntory will be offering sales support with the Pollinator Partnership. The new Yellow has also been incorporated in some new mixes, too.

Argyranthemum Golden Butterfly (Proven Winners)

Golden Butterfly replaces the original Butterfly, which was introduced way back in 1993. It joins Pure White, which was unveiled last year. The new color is more stable than Butterfly, but it's got the same habit.



Lavender Bandera Pink (Kieft)

Lavenders continue to be popular perennials. Bandera Pink (left) joins Bandera Purple as the only seed-propagated, professional-quality *L. stoechas* cultivars on the market. Both are considered breeding breakthroughs in this category. Bandera Pink has a compact to medium growth habit (7- to 9-in. tall) with excellent branching and uniformity. This first-year flowering lavender features large, soft pink flags ("banderas" in Spanish) on spikes with deep rose flowers. Great variety for bench run programs. Hardy to Zone 7a, Bandera Pink would make a great annual in northern containers.

Bidens Bidy Boom Wildfire, Bidy Bop Blaze (Dümmen Orange)

While yellows have dominated bidens forever, the recent orange-hued flowers have really caught growers' and consumers' attention. Bidy Boom Wildfire has slightly larger flowers with a bit more distinction in the flower color. Bidy Bop Blaze has more texture in its foliage and slightly darker and smaller flower petals.

Leucanthemum Sweet Daisy Cher (Dümmen Orange)

A new spider-flowered shasta daisy, Cher is a first-year flowering leucanthemum—that's right, no vernalization requirement. Cher has a compact habit (10-in. tall) and blooms profusely. This is a great item for nearly all container sizes, from 1 qt. up to 2-gal. pots. Cher produces attractive containers when grown by itself or used in combinations. Hardy to at least Zone 5, possibly to Zone 4.



Buddleia Tornado (Thompson & Morgan)

T&M is calling Tornado a "3-in-1" variety, with three different colors in one mix. It continues to flower all season long.

Salvia Rose Marvel (Darwin Perennials)

Colored salvia (besides shades of blue) are in high demand and this new rose-colored salvia cultivar might be just what you've been looking for. Rose Marvel (sister to Blue Marvel) has the largest flowers of any of the rose-colored varieties on the market. The flowers have a rich, deep rose coloration, a long flowering window and reblooms without being cut back. Hardy in Zones 4a to 9b.

Ageratum Bumble (Westhoff)

Westhoff's new ageratum series is said to have a more mounding habit than the Artist series. With four colors, Bumble is a great heat-loving summer annual. **GT**