

GROWERTALKS

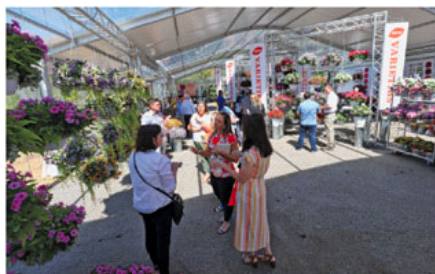
Features

8/1/2021

Perennials First

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What? No annuals? Just perennials in our California Trials coverage? That's almost sacrilegious! Well, worry not, we are simply changing up the order of our coverage this year—much like the Trial hosts did when they moved the annual event from spring to summer. Annuals will take center stage next month.



Because of the pandemic, the 2021 California Summer Trials (CAST) might not have taken place had not the trial site hosts decided last summer to test out a new time period—June—in hopes of attracting more growers to the event. Alas, the late June slot didn't achieve the desired results attendee-wise (CAST will move back to Week 13 for 2022), but it did at least allow the event to take place, California having lifted its COVID mandates just weeks before. Visitors could not have been happier to be looking at the new varieties in person instead of online. We can't recall so many smiling, maskless faces. Hugs were as common as firm handshakes.

Takeaways and highlights

Outdoors and in the ground. COVID simplified the trials and moved them outdoors. Breeders invested less in fluff and smaller displays, and instead focused on genetics, both in pots and in the ground. It put the focus on the plants and with good results. A few of the trials were sparse due to the uncertainty of the times, but most had ample numbers of displays ... even the box lunches were, for the most part, on par with the normal buffet lunches, so nobody had to struggle through the week fueled only by water and granola bars.

No star of the show. We can't recall any one memorable variety that everyone was talking about up and down the coast. Don't get us wrong—there were plenty of good introductions, both new series and color additions—but nothing ground-breaking or game-changing ... although now that we think about it, there was an interspecific hydrangea called Game Changer you can read about below.

Availability is the big question. It's always been important to deal with suppliers who can actually deliver what they promise, but that's more the topic of the season than ever before.

Demand for our products has been through the roof in '20 and '21, and is expected to continue next year. Having “seed in the bag” (which extends to cuttings, plugs and liners, too) is almost more important than price.

For more CAST coverage on perennials, sign up for Paul Pilon's Perennial Pulse newsletter at growertalks.com/Newsletters.

Pictured: Some of the trials, such as Dümme Orange, looked and felt no different than before the pandemic.

Pictured: A few trials, like Sakata, left plenty of space for social distancing due to the uncertainty of California's open-for-business status. However, they made sure the important introductions were on display.

Pictured: The Ball company trials at their PanAmerican Seed location featured old-fashioned outdoor beds, as well as an open greenhouse and a sail-covered container display.

Pictured: Benary had planned on self-guided trial tours with few amenities, but as registration increased and COVID eased, they increased their staffing and services—all outdoors, however. Even CEO Matthias Redlefsen (second from right) flew in from Germany to give tours.

New Perennials



Echibeckia Summerina (Pacific Plug & Liner)

Echibeckia Summerina Sunchaser (an echinacea/rudbeckia cross) is a big plant with wild-looking, huge blooms. You'll have to see the photos or watch our video to see this thing. It actually looked like a silk plant, but was most certainly real. Joining Sunchaser in the echibeckia collection are two other new Summerinas—Sunreef, with red centers in the blooms, and Sunbeat, with bright yellow blooms and dark eyes. Zone 7.

Buddleia Chrysalis (Darwin Perennials)

An all-new series that's more compact than traditional varieties, resulting in excellent flower power. The five colors in the series—White, Blue, Cranberry, Pink and Purple—will bloom all season long. Zone 5.

Lavender LaDiva (Dümme Orange)

Dümme had four new lavender varieties in their perennials tent. Big Night was the most impressive—it looks like a typical Spanish lavender, but is actually an interspecific hybrid. They said it's very heat tolerant, surviving in Zone 6 at Battlefield Farms in Virginia.

Imperial is a *dentata* type that's ideal for areas in the southwest because of its heat and drought tolerance. It's only hardy to Zone 8, but it can work in large combinations.

Vintage Violet and Eternal Elegance are both *angustifolia* types that are hardy to Zone 4 and first-year flowering.

Heuchera Big Top Caramel Apple (Darwin Perennials)

Big Top Caramel Apple kicks off what could be a future series that's much larger than their Carnival series with large

foliage and a big habit. New foliage starts off red or burgundy and matures to caramel. Zone 4.



Delphinium Delgenius Glitzy (Pacific Plug & Liner)

Part of their Delgenius collection, Glitzy has rich blue-purple flowers and a white “bee” in the center. Delgenius are bred to have multiple flower spikes instead of one dominant spike and then little or nothing in the way of other flowers. Zone 3.

Lavender Lavenize (Pacific Plug & Liner)

They call the collection Lavenize—a fun way to turn a plant into a verb. Lavenize has four varieties—Fully, PomPom, Elegance and Power—that bloom from early spring through June in that order. Zone 4. Oh, they also showed a tiny one, Lilliput, that should be great for the grocery store market. It’s coming in 2023.

Rudbeckia Dakota (Green Fuse)

There are four varieties in this series, including one with double flowers called Double Gold. It’s got a long bloom window, flowering for up to five months in the garden. Our perennial expert, Paul Pilon, reminds us that these are the first-ever Rudbeckia hirta cultivars that are hardy to Zone 5.

Leucanthemum White Lion (Kieft Seed)

Leucanthemum White Lion is an early blooming Shasta daisy that only needs 10 hours of daylight to initiate flowers. It’s quite similar to Leucanthemum Madonna, which is later to flower, needing 14½ hours of daylength to flower. Zone 4.



Artemisia SunFern (Darwin Perennials)

SunFern, they call it, because it looks like a fern, but takes full, hot sun. It’s *Artemisia gmelinii* ... the g is silent (pronounce it like “Millennial,” but with the double i on the end). No flowers—it’s grown for its fern-like foliage, which is non-invasive and tidy. Use it as a compact groundcover or even in full-sun containers where you want that ferny texture. There are two SunFerns: Olympia is a bit taller and greener than Arcadia, which is more gray-green. Darwin said they’re even testing it as a leatherleaf fern alternative. Zone 4.

Eupatorium Little-Pye (Dümmen Orange)

A smaller version of the very popular Joe Pye variety, Little-Pye is a U.S. native that’s pollinator-friendly. Zone 4.

Lobelia Starship Rose (Kieft Seed)

Rose joins Starship Scarlet, Blue, Burgundy and Scarlet Bronze Leaf, which were all introduced last year. This *L. speciosa* has strong colors and a uniform habit that attracts hummingbirds and butterflies. Zone 6.

Monarda Bee Mine (Darwin Perennials)

This new series of bee balm includes three colors—Red, Pink and Lavender—that are first-year flowering and hardy to Zone 4. It's a medium-sized series that's larger than their Balmy series.

Coreopsis Reina Single Giant Gold (Green Fuse)

A variety with bright yellow blooms with a lot of flower power. Zone 5.



Gaura Walberton's Silver Fountain (PlantHaven)

A U.S. native that's sterile, so it'll last all season long, Silver Fountain has interesting variegated foliage with delicate, airy white flowers on top. Zone 5.

Geranium Intense (Flamingo Holland)

Geranium Intense is a perennial geranium in neon pink that they say will bloom all season. The plant we saw had already been in flower for three months and it looked like it had just gotten started. Zone 4.

Gaillardia Marmalade (Southern Living & Sunset Magazine)

Marmalade, which had excellent longevity in trials, had been in bloom for 90 days when we saw it, they said, and it didn't appear to be stopping anytime soon. Being Zone-5 hardy and in both the Sunset and Southern Living Collections means they'll look great in gardens across most of the country.

Lysimachia Firefly (Darwin Perennials)

What they call a "component plant" that's a great new alternative for the shade. Zone-5.



Heuchera Frilly (Flamingo Holland)

You know what a loofah looks like? Well, then you've seen Frilly. Tightly growing, small foliage in a tan color—quite the novelty! Zone 4.

Heuchera Carnival (Darwin Perennials)

Shoppers are always interested in what's new with this traditional shade perennial, available in a range of colors. New for 2022 are two in the Carnival series—Cinnamon Stick and Burgundy Blast are ideal for gallon pots and larger. Zone 4.

And a couple of shrubs ...

Hydrangea Game Changer (Green Fuse)

A new interspecific hydrangea, it's called Game Changer for about a dozen reasons, explained Steve Jones. First, it can be grown as a potted plant or landscape plant, and it needs no vernalization to flower—in fact, from a cutting it can be sold in about 12 weeks. It's a lace-cap type, which we know is trendy. You can buy it as an unrooted cutting or a rooted liner. It's got thick leaves and is less prone to wilt compared to potted hydrangeas. And, finally, it's said to bloom on new wood AND old wood. Lots of claims! You'll have to give it a try to find out if it performs as promised. Zone 5.

Rose Brindabella Crimson Knight (Suntory)

Crimson Knight brings the rose collection to seven colors. Its top attributes are very fragrant double flowers and strong disease resistance. And the buds emerge almost black before opening to red, giving it some extra consumer interest. Zone 5.

Check out all of our videos on our YouTube channel (youtube.com/growertalks).