

GROWERTALKS

Features

9/1/2021

California Summer Trials '21

Chris Beytes, Bill Calkins & Jennifer Zurko

The main topic of discussion at the California Summer Trials (CAST) wasn't about a genetic breakthrough or a stunning new color, it was, "What do you do think about this late June timing?" That's because since its inception in the late 1960s, "Pack Trials" have always been held in late March or early April, when the California flower breeders traditionally evaluate the year's new crop of genetics to see which ones are worthy of their next catalog.

It was pressure from a few distribution companies that encouraged breeders to try this new June timing—fortuitously, as it turns out, as the state of California probably wouldn't have allowed an April in-person event. And nobody wanted to do it via Zoom again!

However, a saying by one of the editor's dads is apropos for the new June timing: "It's a good idea, we just won't use it." While the weather was fine (although blistering hot during setup) and the plants looked good, there were very fewer early spring crops on display.

More importantly, however, broker sales reps said that June is too late to help customers with ordering decisions for the coming season, and so it was decided by a consortium of Trials hosts (at a meeting at Cultivate'21 in July) to return to the "normal" CAST time of late March or early April (depending primarily on when Easter falls).

For both 2022 and 2023, CAST will be during Week 13—specifically Wednesday, March 30 to Sunday, April 3, 2022 (Easter is April 17) and Wednesday, March 29 to Sunday, April 2, 2023 (Easter is April 9).

As for genetic breakthroughs and stunning new colors? We saw none of the former, but plenty of the latter! Breeders and distributors rolled out good shows despite lingering COVID concerns. A few Trials felt "just like the good old days," while others allowed loads of room for social distancing. Just about all had some or even all of their displays outdoors and even in the ground, another throwback to "Pack Trials" of old.

Read on to discover the memorable intros, new series and excellent additions from this year's California Summer Trials.

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

Memorable Intros



Petunia E3 Easy Wave series (PanAmerican Seed)

According to PanAmerican, E3 stands for “Early, Efficient and Evolution.” In a nutshell, E3 blooms under 10-hour or less days, making it ideal for southern growers doing winter petunia production. But all growers will appreciate this new Wave’s dome-shaped habit. The series starts with five colors. If you’re wondering, that now makes five different Wave series: the original Wave, Easy Wave, Shock Wave, Tidal Wave and now E3 Easy Wave (not counting Cool Wave, which is a pansy, not a petunia).

BloomStudios’ first official event, new intros

BloomStudios, the newest division of Ball Horticultural Company, is focused exclusively on cut flowers—specifically new product development, cultural and technical resources, and sales and marketing support. It’s interesting to see resources being applied to the cut flower market both domestically and globally to help move the needle and get more cut flowers into the hands of today’s shoppers.

BloomStudios has quite a few intros for 2022, but three were standouts: Katz Hi Double White is a matthiola (stock) with 90%-plus double flowers, upping the game quite a bit because single flowered stems end up being culled out and dumped. Marigold Xochi (pronounced “so-chee”) Orange is a tall, large-flowered cut marigold with a rich orange color and strong stems. And in the popular Potomac Snapdragon series, Dark Pink replaces Rose.

Petunia Crazytunia (Westhoff)

Westhoff has almost 70 of them now and the color range is getting ... well ... crazy. New Crazytunias for 2022 include Magenta Storm, Mayan Sunset and Black & White. Mayan Sunset is a beautiful color that will help move the collection into landscape use with a more trailing and spreading habit. And Black & White truly does look like it’s colorless, with white blooms featuring black veins and patterns within each flower.

Westhoff also showed new petunia varieties containing the infamous orange gene—officially called the A1DFR gene—that has recently been okay’d for flowers by the USDA. Thanks to that decision, the Hells series returns with three new colors: Hells Ember Red, Hells Heat and Hells Forge, as well as two Crazytunias with the orange gene, Nightwatch and Frisky Orange. (As of now we know of no other breeder looking to introduce or reintroduce petunias containing the A1DFR gene.)



Petunia Surfinia XXL Taffy Pink (Suntory)

Everybody knows the Surfinias are excellent petunias; XXL is a jumbo-flowered version of it—a vegetative grandiflora, if you like. Taffy Pink is just as you picture it—a vivid hot pink.

Salvia Bodacious Hummingbird Falls (PlantHaven)

Not only was there a good offering of pollinator plants at PlantHaven's trial, there were hummingbirds darting in and out, irritated at the humans invading their greenhouse full of tasty nectar. Appropriately, they were most interested in last-year's intro, Hummingbird's Lunch, a large, bloom-covered cuphea, as well as the latest attractor named Salvia Bodacious Hummingbird Falls, said to be the first hanging basket salvia. It has the popular black-and-blue color palette of regular *Salvia guaranitica*, but with a trailing habit.

Basewell gel for rooted cuttings (Dümmen Orange)

Basewell, Dümmen Orange's rooted cutting program, now offers an effective way to root cuttings offshore (where the climate is good and the labor is less expensive), then ship them north to you with the roots protected by a firm gel (approved by the USDA for import). Basewell lets you stick, by hand or machine, a rooted cutting at a lower cost than traditional liners. How much cheaper? Check out their easy-to-use cost calculator at www.growbasewell.com. As of now, the Basewell gel is available on all of Dümmen's geraniums. They're working on using it for other crops, too.



BeGreen seed technology (Benary)

Sustainability is important to Benary, and when they analyzed existing seed treatments and enhancements, such as coating, pelleting and priming, they found they use a lot of chemical ingredients—even microplastics. So they went to work developing greener treatment options, with first priority being that the treatment must be as good or better than the existing treatment. The result is BeGreen, used on all of their seed that needs any sort of treatment. Here, Benary's Matt Mart explains the concept to Bill and Jen (while overlooking Benary's new BellaDaisy Bellis series, formerly only available in Europe).

Ptilotus Joey Improved (Benary)

Do you remember when the original Joey was introduced back around 2010? A fascinating plant, but the habit was a bit too random and rangy to make a good show. Joey Improved makes a much better show, as evidenced in the great-looking, floriferous quart pots they showed. It should now make a good retail display. Near the quarts, they showed Joey Improved in mature tubs (pictured) that were planted back in April, which show that the consumer is going to get a spectacular show in the garden.

Calibrachoa Rainbow (Dümmen Orange)

Rainbow offers flowers that change colors from pale to bold based on the conditions they're in. With multiple bloom colors on one plant, they look like a mixed container without the hassle of planting multiple varieties. Culture-wise, they perform like Dümmen's Aloha series. Seven color-changing colors in the series.

New Series



Petunia Cannon Ball (Ball FloraPlant)

The name of the new Cannon Ball series should give you a clear idea of its habit: ball-shaped. Petunia is the comparison for this roundy-moundy series. Cannon Ball can be grown pot-tight, has a narrow seven-day bloom window and shows good cold tolerance, they say. The series starts with seven colors. It will be replacing the SunSpun series.

Lantana Shamrock (Ball FloraPlant)

If you're looking for heat-tolerant annuals, Shamrock fits the bill. It's got a controlled, mounding habit that is more vigorous than Little Lucky but not as spreading as Lucky (hence the name). Shamrock starts with four colors: White, Orange Flame, Peach and Rose.

Verbena Beats (Selecta One)

Selecta lists quite a few attributes of Beats: it's the earliest verbena on the market (by two weeks, they say); it needs no pinch and no PGRs; it can be grown in nearly any pot size, from packs to tubs; and it's "hyper-uniform." The series starts with six colors and two Trixi mixes.



Lobelia Hot+ (Westhoff)

Lobelia Hot+ improves upon the popular Hot series by having a slightly looser, more vigorous habit that allows them to "play well with others," growing into and out of its companions in combination planters. The Hot+ series has six colors.

Angelonia Serafina (Westhoff)

Angelonia Serafina has been bred for heavy branching and lots of flowers. It has seven colors.

Portulaca 24/7 (Green Fuse)

Just to show you the small details we notice, we believe this is the first plant series whose name consists entirely of

numbers. But we get what Green Fuse is implying: the flowers stay open a long time. Not 24 hours a day, they admitted (THAT would be a genetic breakthrough!), but longer than typical. The series starts with White, Yellow, Fuschia, Orange and Red.



Angelonia Angelissa (Sakata)

A new genus for Sakata, Angelonia Angelissa series starts with Rose, White and Purple.

Lantana Sundance (Sakata)

Another new crop genus for Sakata, Lantana Sundance starts off with the core colors of Yellow, Red and White.

Begonia Viking Explorer (Sakata)

The Viking series is one of those big, bold varieties like BIG and DragonWing, and Viking Explorer is a cascading/trailing version of Viking. There are two colors: Rose on Green and Red on Green.

Snapdragon Statement (Takii)

On paper, Statement is your standard early, pack-type snap series. But there's something about its large flowers and heavy branching that gives the plants a "fluffy" look. (Bill thought the White looks like popcorn, and we had to agree.) Statement has five colors.



Gerbera Garvinea Majestic (HilverdaFlorist)

Garvineas are what Dutch breeder HilverdaFlorist calls their landscape gerberas, which are from tissue culture, are powdery mildew resistant and Zone 7a hardy. The collection gets a new sub-series called Majestic, which are double-flowered, with four colors: Light Pink, Purple, Yellow and Burgundy.

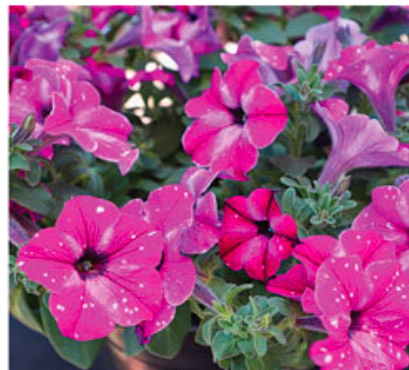
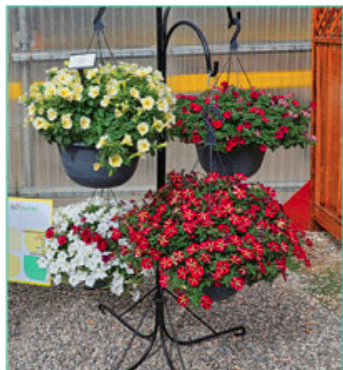
Marigold Endurance (Syngenta)

It's a triploid, or interspecific hybrid—basically, they explained, an African marigold bloom atop a French marigold plant, with the timing of a French marigold. It's able to handle cool temps and high light. And being a triploid means it's sterile, so it keeps on blooming. Sunset Gold, Orange and Yellow are available for 2022.

Torenia Hi-Lite (Syngenta)

Hi-Lite has been bred for bigger, brighter colors, plus heat and sun performance. We think torenia is an underused summer annual and hope this series helps grow consumer demand. The series launches with six colors. It will replace the Duchess series.

Other Notable New and A+ Additions



Petunia ColorRush (Ball FloraPlant)

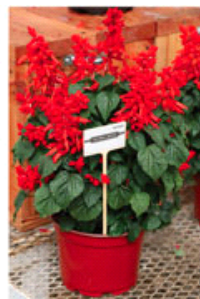
ColorRush Petunias are bred for vigor and landscape performance. New this year are Red and Yellow. We also saw Merlot Star Improved, a nice upgrade.

Calibrachoa Bumble Bee Hot Pink (Ball FloraPlant)

Bumble Bee Hot Pink is a super-cool calibrachoa flower pattern that will be perfect as a novelty in monoculture baskets and pots. The center is vivid yellow surrounded by dark purple and bright pink tones.

Petunia Headliner Enchanted Sky, Starlet Midnight Sky (Selecta One)

A few years ago, Selecta introduced the world to Night Sky, a first-of-its-kind spotted petunia that took the industry by storm. That opened up a new market for such color patterns. Now they're adding Sky types into their existing series of petunias. New for 2022 are Headliner Enchanted Sky and Starlet Midnight Sky. Enchanted Sky brings two patterns to the table: the characteristic "sky" spots, plus a star pattern in the middle of the flower. Midnight Sky, meanwhile, is a deep, velvety purple with a constellation of stars throughout. And here's a Tech Tip for you: cooler night temps mean more spots on the blooms.



Impatiens Beacon Rose (PanAmerican Seed)

Impatiens walleriana are back on benches and in gardens around the world, thanks to impatiens downy mildew-resistant varieties like Beacon. PanAmerican is expanding Beacon's color range, adding Rose to the assortment.

this year, along with a new Formula Mix. The series is up to seven colors and two mixes. We were also reminded that since October 2020, Beacon seed has been only available in coated form—no raw seed—for better grower success. But the price didn't change!

Petunia Limbo and Mambo (Hem Genetics)

Limbo and Mambo definitely opened new markets for naturally compact seed petunias, and Hem continues to add to both lines. Limbo (their grandiflora series) gets a Silver Blue variety this year, and both Limbo and Mambo (the multiflora type) add Yellow Lime, which is bright and showy.

Salvia Red Hill (Hem Genetics)

This annual salvia grows up to 2-ft. tall in the garden. The stronger flower stems should hold up all summer long.



Petunia Good & Plenty Mustard (Green Fuse)

You can guess that it's yellow, and a rich yellow, competing with Bee's Knees and Yellowstone. We also believe it's the first flower variety to be named for a condiment—we can only hope the red version is named ketchup! (Never mind that Good & Plenty reminds us of the licorice-flavored movie theatre candy ...)

Dipladenia Sun Parasol Sunbeam (Suntory)

Everyone knows Suntory's popular Sun Parasol line of tropical dipladenias. New for this year is Sunbeam, a beautiful yellow-flowered variety. What amazed us was the flower power and number of buds on each plant. And this one requires no pinching to create the nice shape.

Dahlia Mystic Wizard (PlantHaven)

Mystic Wizard sports bronze foliage and big, single flowers in a rich, jewel-toned magenta.

New Guinea Impatiens (Dümmen Orange)

An improved White for the Petticoat series is an important NGI mix component. Three new colors in Wild Romance, their vigorous landscape series, are Lavender, Peach and Hot Rose, bringing the series count to six. Just next to them was an eye-catching display of Magnum Duos, a group of two-color combos that looked really nice in their simplicity (Magnums are their big, bold hanging basket New Guineas). Duos aren't a program, just a concept, showing you how to put two colors in one pot for added consumer appeal.



Coleus Main Street (Dümmen Orange)

The coleus category keeps growing ... and Dümmen just grew it a little bit more with four additions to their Main Street collection of vigorous sun/shade coleus: Orchard Road, Yonge Street, Bourbon Street and Venice Boulevard (pictured).

Begonia l'conia (Dümmen Orange)

It's impossible to count how many vegetative begonias are on the market, but there aren't many that are scented and that's what sets the l'conia Scentiment collection apart. New Peachy Keen, with its light citrus scent, joins Just Peachy and Sunrise.

l'conia Lemon Berry, meanwhile, isn't scented, but its delicate appearance belies its garden toughness, taking sun and heat with no problem, they say.

SunPatiens (Sakata)

There are four additions to the massive SunPatiens collection. The SunPatiens Compact series gets Deep Red (pictured), Rose Glow and Hot Pink. And the SunPatiens Vigorous series gets Sweetheart White (pictured), plus White Improved.



Zinnia Profusion Double Red (Sakata)

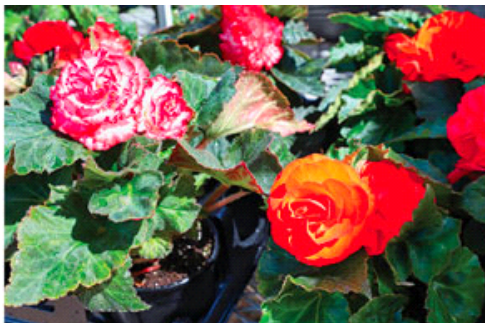
Profusion Zinnia, Sakata's most awarded annual, got yet another award-winner in 2020—Red Yellow Bicolor. This 2021 intro won an All-America Selections Gold Medal. Joining it is Profusion Double Red, which may not have any awards, but it's still a good addition to the series, which, at our count, now has 10 colors and two mixes.

Gerbera Patio (HilverdaFlorist)

If you want something really big for big containers, try HilverdaFlorist's Patio gerbera line. Named for parks around the world, the Patios get two new ones: Hot Springs and Daintree. An addition to the Patios is Patio Glorious, which sport big, furry, complex flowers.

French Marigold SuperHero (Benary)

SuperHero, which debuted a couple of years ago, is the obvious name for an upgrade of the venerable Hero French Marigold series. SuperHero gets two new colors, Gold and Deep Yellow, plus an improved Deep Orange.



Verbena Vectura (Benary)

Vectura are low-growing but tight and controlled varieties. Blue Wing and Violet are new for 2022, while White, Soft Pink Eye and Dark Red have been improved.

Begonia Nonstop (Benary)

Rose Picotee and Salmon (pictured) are the two newest colors in the original Nonstops; while the larger, hanging basket-oriented Nonstop Joy series gets three additions, Joy Orange, Joy Red and Joy Rose Picotee, for five colors total.

Cleome Sparkler 2.0 (Syngenta)

Cleome Sparkler 2.0 is an improvement to the old series, which has been upgraded to the point that the seed no longer requires priming, making availability a bit more reliable. New to the series is Purple.



Geranium Calliope (Syngenta)

The interspecific Calliope Medium series (slightly more compact than the original Calliope) gets Dark Red Dark Leaf (because customers like that darker foliage), while the original series (now called Large) gets White (we were surprised it didn't already have a white!).

Lantana Bandana Gold (Syngenta)

Gold is new for their flagship Lantana Bandana series, the one with the more compact, mounding habit. It's a rich gold color and will fill any size pot, from quarts to gallons.

Petunia SuperCal (Sakata)

Four new colors were added to the large-flowered SuperCal Premium series of petunia/calibrachoa ("Petchoa") crosses. Purple Dawn, Sunset Orange, Yellow Sun and Pearl White bring new colors into the series of heat- and

frost-tolerant plants. For the traditional SuperCal series, Pink Improved is new for 2022. **GT**