

# GROWERTALKS

## Cover Story

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## More Perennials Emerge at CAST

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In years past, perennials used to be kept far, far away from the packs of annuals at California Spring Trials (or “Pack Trials” as it was called back then, due to the abundance of packs on the benches). But a few started to slip in under the guise of “garden plants,” and now perennials are as ubiquitous as annuals at some trials.

For instance, perennial breeder/propagator Walters Gardens had a full display. At Dümme Orange, we were shown as many new perennials as we were annuals—maybe more. ThinkPlants is nothing but perennials (plus potted plants). Pacific Plug & Liner bragged that they stock more than 2,500 perennials and specialty products. Ball has an entire division, Darwin, devoted to the crop.

We can't cover each and every introduction, so consider this list partial, but it's safe to say that (at least these days) CAST is almost as much a destination for perennial growers as it is annual growers.

Here are highlights from the new perennials varieties we saw in California this past March. (Note: At least one perennial made our primary coverage in the July issue.)

Find our full YouTube Playlist from CAST '26 [HERE!](#) And listen to our post-CAST podcast through *Tech On Demand* on Apple, Spotify or wherever you listen to your podcasts.



### Digitalis DiBella (Hem Genetics)

The DiBella series, soft-launched last year, features extremely uniform plants in four colors. It's well-branched and floriferous—and most importantly, there's plenty of seed in the bag! And that seed has a high germination percentage of 95%. Hardy to Zone 5.

### Heliopsis Forged In Fire (Walters Gardens)

Heliopsis Forged in Fire has double flowers, dark stems, tons of branches (hence tons of flowers) and best of all is mildew resistant. Great for summer and fall color. Hardy to Zone 3.

### Hellebore Frostkiss (Pacific Plug & Liner)

Magico is an improvement over Glenda's Gloss, with a more compact habit and a later bloom time (so you can perhaps offer it when there's not still snow on the ground). Flowers are white and deep magenta. Vibey Velvet, meanwhile, is an improvement of Anna's Red—it's shorter, later and has a better habit. Flowers are deep red with burgundy flecks. Both are hardy to Zone 5.

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### Ajuga Feathered Friends (Kientzler)

Bred by well-known plantsman Chris Hansen of Chick Charms fame, Feathered Friends puts LOADS of pink or blue upright flowers on this traditional groundcover. Foliage is either chartreuse or slightly bronzed. One culture tip for this Zone-4 perennial: It needs vernalization, meaning 41F for six to eight weeks.

### Agastache Honeysticks Gold (Dümmen Orange)

This agastache is aptly named for its loads of rich golden-yellow upright flowers. It's not the first yellow agastache, we're told, but we doubt you'll find one with a better habit—it almost looks like an annual, it's so tidy and mounding. But it's definitely a Zone-4 perennial.

### Salvia Living Large Dark Sky (Walters Gardens)

Living Large Dark Sky is a novel hybrid, a cross between *S. nemorosa* and *S. fancysauce* (as the Walters folks joked—in other words, they ain't giving away their breeding secrets). The plants were a bit rangy in the trial, but in the tag photos the plants and blue flowers look spectacular. And Living Large Dark Sky is tough—hardy to Zones 3.

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### **Lavender Scent Mini Blue (ThinkPlants)**

A small *L. angustifolia* type hardy to Zone 5, Scent Mini Blue apparently has a high oil concentration because without even brushing up against it, the fragrance hit us from about 4 ft. away. It's first-year-flowering and billed as the "next generation" of the Scent series.

### **Sedum Cloudburst (Dümmen Orange)**

Another newer collection that gets 2027 additions is Sedum CloudBurst, which now includes Cloudburst Copper and Cloudburst Lime. They join Burgundy and Green Flash, bringing the collection to four colors. These pretty little sedums are Zone-4 hardy.

### **Hyssop Nectar Ninja (Walters Gardens)**

Hyssop Nectar Ninja might be the perfect perennial: It's easy to grow, has tons of flowers, is drought-tolerant, offers all-season color and pollinators love it. What more do you need? Hardy to Zone 4.



### **Echinacea Mooodz Zen (HilverdaFlorist)**

HilverdaFlorist has a tissue culture series of echinacea called Mooodz (yes, three Os) named for emotions and feelings; new for 2027 is the first white in the series, named Zen. It does replace a previous white coneflower called Glory. We were told this series is one of the fastest from TC plantlet to finished plant of any TC echinacea on the market. Hardy to Zone 4.

### **Sedum Spectacular (PanAmerican Seed)**

The first perennial sedum from seed for PanAmerican, Spectacular is a medium-sized *S. spectabile* type that is bred to not flop open or break in the landscape. Chartreuse green foliage and light pink flowers make it stand out in garden beds and even in combos. A short-day plant when a young plant, it only requires a minimum of 14 hours to bloom. Grows 12- to 14-in. high and is great for pollinators. Reliable supply available as multi-pellet seed. Hardy to Zone 3.

### **Coreopsis Sun Globe Gold (Hem Genetics)**

Sun Globe Gold looked to be really well branched, with ruffled double yellow flowers. As an added bonus, it's first-year flowering. Hardy to Zone 4.

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### **Botanical Cyclamen Lify (Morel)**

There are more than two dozen species of hardy perennial cyclamen and Morel is offering two of them, which they call “botanical types.” Lify is a *C. hederifolium*, while Koumy is a *C. coum* selection. They can open up a whole new world of cyclamen fun to you perennial growers. Hardy to Zone 5.

### **Lavender Butterfly Garden (Darwin Perennials)**

The new Spanish Lavender Butterfly Garden series is launching with two colors—Plum Perfect (a deep purple cone/pineapple) and Poppin' Pink (a unique color for *L. stoechas*). The Darwin guys told us these are very grower-friendly, ship well and are available as URCs and callused cuttings. Hardy to Zone 6b.

### **Gaillardia Gusto Swift Saffron (ThinkPlants)**

The Gusto series roots well and is easy to grow. And in the garden it has an attractive mounded habit. And because it “buries its dead” (meaning the new blooms cover the old ones), it looks fresh longer. The new one is Swift Saffron; it joins Lemon, Orange Zest and Paprika Sweet Chili. Hardy to Zone 4.

### **Helianthemum SunBurst (Darwin Perennials)**

A classic garden plant commonly called rock rose, the SunBurst series starts with three colors (Pink, Rose and White) that love the heat. Helianthemum has a ton of uses and just might be perfect for a new generation of gardeners. Hardy to Zone 5a. **GT**