

Day 4 of CAST: The New Varieties Keep Coming!

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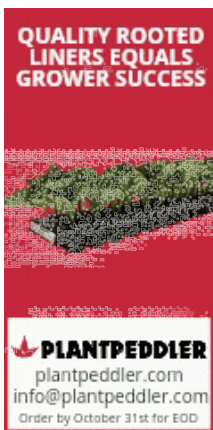
- Sakata
- Takii
- Beekenkamp
- Monrovia
- ABZ Seeds
- Green Fuse Botanicals

30 YEARS wave

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On toilet seats and sweatpants



Chris: Hey, Ellen! It's Day 4 of CAST ... which would have been Monday, March 30, and we would have driven long and hard from the central portion of the trials up to Salinas and our northern home for a few days. But in reality, it's Wednesday, April 9, and this morning I drove to Home Depot for a new toilet seat.

Ellen: I really don't wanna know why that was such an essential task that it took you out of the safety of your home. And with a mask on!

Chris: Let's just say that toilet paper isn't the only essential part of the bathroom.

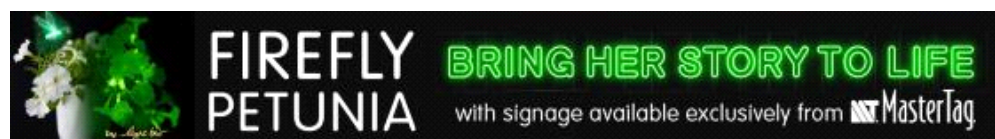
Ellen: I have broken two toilet tanks in my lifetime. I'm a pro at that. Seats? I don't break those.

Chris: I knew we were good at digressions, but this is ridiculous! Let's get back to the task at hand, shall we, which is covering the new varieties from the event that would have been known as the California Spring Trials, but which now is known as the "Bobblehead Pants-Are-Optional Zoom New Variety Interviews."

Ellen: I tried to wear sweatpants to one of them and I just couldn't do it.

Chris: Too casual? Or too fancy? Well, regardless, we've got a busy day ahead of us: Sakata, then Takii, then to the big orchid greenhouse at Floricultura to see Beekenkamp, Monrovia and strawberry breeder ABZ Seeds. And then a virtual backtrack down to Santa Paula, where Steve Jones has finally delivered us some Green Fuse photos and videos. I believe it's my turn to do the variety rundown, so let me jump right into it.

Ellen: Yes, jump!



SunPatiens are officially venerable

Chris: SunPatiens are now in their 15th year, which—to my mind, anyway—gives them the official classification of "venerable"—meaning been around long enough to have earned respect. The series gets two additions, both to the "Compact" subseries: Compact Rose Glow and Compact Hot Pink. Rose Glow truly does seem to glow, even in photographs. It's a new color for the series, we were told. Hot Pink is going to replace Neon Pink, as it's been bred for better heat and drought tolerance, to better match the improvements the whole line has been getting.



SunPatiens Compact Rose Glow

In pansies, the Grandio series gets two new colors and a mix: Beacon Rose, Deep Blue with Blotch, and the Star Spangled Mix (featuring True Blue, Clear Rose and White with Rose Blotch). Both new colors are in the regular Grandio series and the Spring Grandio series.

Petunia SuperCal gets two colors: Rose and Royal Red. To refresh your memory, SuperCal is an interspecific hybrid of petunia and calibrachoa, giving it earliness, disease resistance, a grower-friendly habit and excellent garden performance. Think of it like a petunia version of SunPatiens, they say.



Petunia SuperCal Royal Red. Vivid!

Harmony Double Anenome gets a new Double Pink, giving the series four colors. It's a rich rose pink with a white center and a dark eye. I'm not too familiar with anenome, having never grown or gardened with it; I was told a double anenome holds up better in the garden than singles, as they don't shed their flower petals as quickly.



Anenome Harmony Double Pink

Lastly (in flowers anyway) comes some cut flower additions: Campanula Champion II gets Lilac; and Flowering Cabbage Condor White gets joined by a sister color, Red. To see all of these and a few more, check out this [VIDEO SLIDE SHOW](#).

Ellen, you're our veggie guru—take us through what Heather Kibble showed us, wouldja?

Sakata's veggies

Ellen: Sure thing, Chris. Why am I suddenly hungry? Maybe it's all the good veggies Sakata introduced this year. Hey, they've got a ton of varieties in the vault, thanks to their commercial vegetable work, and tweaking and releasing those that are appropriate for market growers and regular ol' folk like you and me is a good thing for them.

Anyway, let's start with a favorite in the consumer garden—tomatoes. First up, Gold Spark. It's a grape type, so fruits are oblong in shape and about half an ounce in size. What's terrific about it for consumers is they're early to harvest, high yielding, sweet and crack resistant—those last two attributes aren't commonly found together. Hey, it's a real looker, too.



Tomato Gold Spark

And then they have another tomato, Shelby, a roma-type with extra-large, firm red fruit. It's determinate and compact for a roma, but still high-yielding and tasty. Plus, it's got a disease package that gets it through the summer with flying colors.

I, for one, really enjoy broccoli—I even eat the stems! With a little peeling away of the woodiness, they're just as tasty as the rest of the head. Well, with Sakata's new Godzilla Broccoli, you don't have to peel much of that stem away at all—just chop and slice and saute or roast. Oh, then there's the GIANT firm head it forms. Ready in about 100 days from transplant.

Chris: With a name like Godzilla, one wouldn't assume it to be single serving-sized.

Ellen: No, that's this next one. I'm interested in trying Asian Delight Pak Choi, a category I've never had luck with because they always seem to bolt before there's much of anything to harvest. Heather says Asian Delight is small to mid-sized, and bolt-tolerant, with the plant holding for about two to three weeks before it finally begins to send up a flowering stalk. It's bred by Seed Solutions and Sakata is partnering with them for distribution. Oh, and it's an All-America Selections winner.



Pak Choi Asian Delight

Lastly, the best name I've heard for a variety thus far in these "virtual" Spring Trials is Large Marge, a pumpkin that tips the scales at 35 to 40 pounds. It's got the blocky shape that's ideal for carving and painting. Ready in 105 days.

Think it'll be a good pumpkin year, Chris?

Chris: I'm hoping and praying that by Halloween we're back to wearing masks only to scare people! Alrighty then, next stop: Takii.



A Sweet Treat



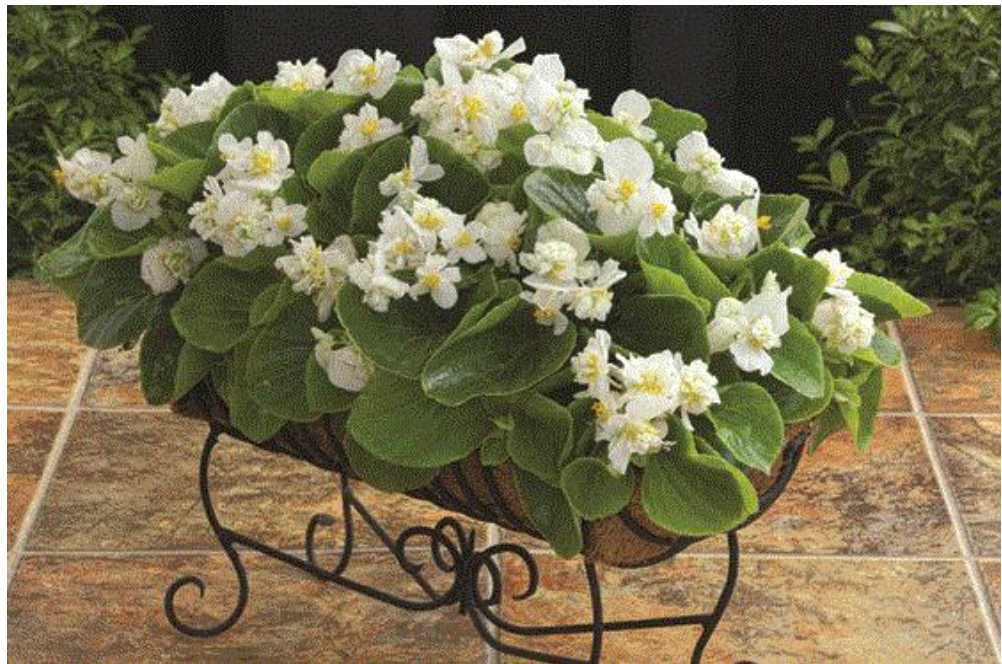
Petunias, begonias, snaps and Jenny

Chris: For Takii's intros, we caught up with Mike Huggett, who Zoomed with us from the comfort of his family-picture-lined Michigan home office. First up? The Trilogy spreading seed petunia series and a new color, Pink Lips. They lost some important Trilogy colors to the "orange gene" debacle a couple years ago, but are making strides to bring in new ones. Such as "Bubblegum" pink, with an attractive mounding habit that still spreads to about 30 in. Trilogy, you'll recall, means it was bred to be good for the grower, the retailer and the end consumer. There are more Trilogy petunias in the back room, Mike says.



Petunia Trilogy Pink Lips

Begonia Fiona is a semi-double fibrous begonia with a tight habit and lots and lots of flowers. The frilly flowers give it the sort of appeal you want to appreciate up close in a container rather than in the back of the garden (such as this wire hay rack showing off the new White). The series adds two new colors, Pink and White, which join Rose and Red (Red is a Fleuroselect Gold winner).



Begonia Fiona White

Snapdragon Statement is an F1 dwarf snap (meaning almost mini, at just 8- to 10-in. tall in the garden). It's bred for lots of side branches, which means lots of flowers. The series starts with five colors, with more on the way.



Snapdragon Statement Red

Lastly, *Delphinium grandiflora* Jenny's Pearl Blue and Jenny's Pearl Pink. Offers stable color during high-temperature production. This first-year flowering perennial can be used for pots or as a cut flower.



Delphinium Jenny's Pearl Blue

Oh, who's Jenny? Jenny Kuhn, Seed Product Manager at Raker-Robertas. (My editors Jen Zurko, Jen Polanz and Jenny White were disappointed to hear it wasn't one of them.)



At the Floricultura stop

Three companies to see at this stop: Beekenkamp, Monrovia and strawberry breeder ABZ Seeds. I'll cover the last one first, as they showed us—or would have shown us—just one new strawberry variety, Summer Breeze Snow. As the name implies, it's a white-flowered addition to the F1 Summer Breeze series, which features double flowers. They say it produces wonderful white flowers all summer long, and bright red fruit that whole time, as well. The only downside? We didn't get to taste it or bring home sample plants. Next year!



Strawberry Summer Breeze Snow

On to Beekenkamp (which is about three steps away), where Sirekit Mol showed us a new Vermillion Begonia, Hot Pink. It's sister to Vermillion Red, which was introduced last year. Vermillion is a *heimalis*-type begonia with loads of rose-like double flowers. It's suited for hanging baskets and shady border use. For a smaller plant, try Bonny, a bright red begonia that's the start of a new series. Naturally compact, it requires few PGRs.



Begonia Vermillion Hot Pink

Another all-new series is in kalanchoes. The Tiger series gets its name from the details of the two-tone flowers. It's a big, vigorous potted plant that starts with three colors: Yellow, Red and—our favorite—Light Orange. They're grrrrrrreat! (Sorry, couldn't resist.)



Kalanchoe Tiger series

They also had a few color additions, such as Sunny Haylie, a pink shades color for the Osteospermum Sunny series; Fuchsia Bella Maria, a trailing fuchsia with bright pinkish-red and purple flowers; and Dahlia Labella Medio Fun Pink with Eye (Labella is the series, Medio indicates the size, Fun means fun colors and Pink with Eye ... well, that's the color).

Last, but hardly least, Monrovia, which offered up an echinacea, a hydrangea and new series of roses. Echinacea Evolution Colorific is a color-shifting addition to the Evolution series (which now has six colors). Colorific's flowers open golden yellow, then turn pinkish-salmon, then pink, before finally fading to deep pink. The Zone 5 perennial grows to about 18-in. tall in the landscape.



Echinacea Evolution Colorific

Newport is another tetraploid *H. macrophylla* in Monrovia's Seaside Serenade collection. Being tetraploid means it's got thicker leaves and flowers. Foliage holds up to weather better and flowers last a bit longer, too. Flowers are a real pretty rose pink; a bonus is they antique nicely over time—great for home flower arranging!



Hydrangea Seaside Serenade Newport

Finally, those roses: It's an all-new series they've dubbed Nitty Gritty, which would imply they're tough. Five colors of spreading roses (White, Yellow, Red, Pink and Peach) grown on their own root that they say are hardy and disease-resistant. They compare to Drift. Nitty Gritty joins Grace N' Grit, which is Monrovia's shrub-type rose.



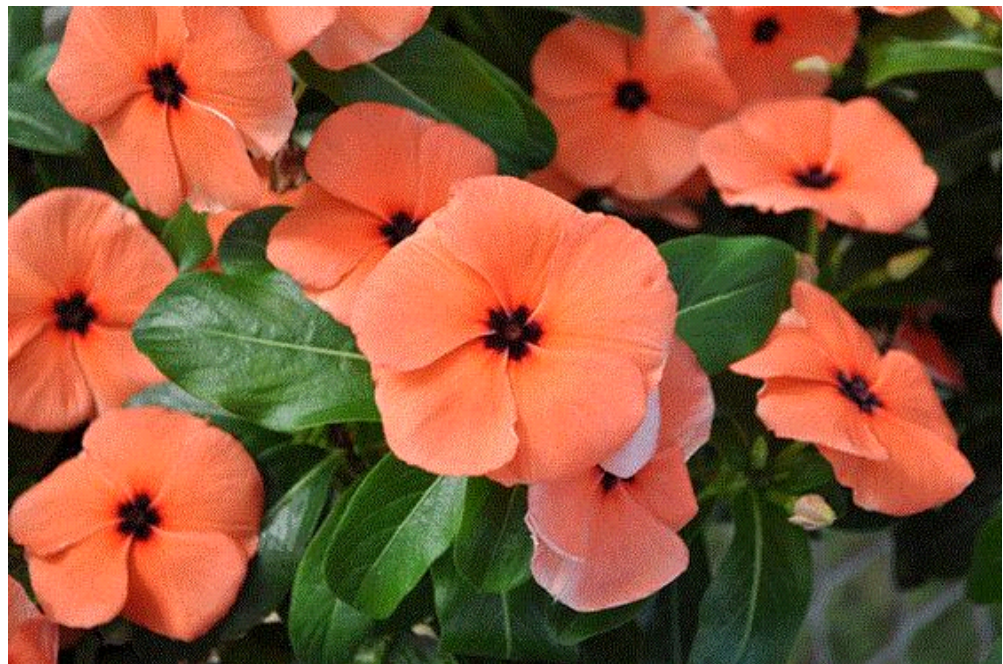


Backtracking to Green Fuse Botanicals

Chris: I did backtrack to Green Fuse once, from Oxnard, when I left a camera battery charging in a wall outlet. But that was a 45-minute mistake. You'd never want to backtrack from Salinas down to Santa Paula—that's 262 miles! But virtually, it's as easy as cut and paste. We saw them on Day 2, but are posting their stuff today because they were just able to get us good photos and videos to share. Bobblehead Bill Calkins did the writing honors. Take it away, Bill!

Bill: At Green Fuse Botanicals, we caught up with company president Steve Jones, who told us Green Fuse is entering its second decade and this is his company's largest introduction year yet—more than 65 new varieties coming to market. Green Fuse is also revealing the name of its breeding division, Calico Genetics—a mashup of California and Colorado. Of course, Green Fuse isn't new to the breeding game, but the name shines a spotlight on an active program that's produced some hot plants over the years.

New this year is the Vinca Quasar series, which launches with five bold colors: Deep Space Blue, Plum Swirl, Orange Target, Red Target and Salmon Target. This vegetative vinca series will perform well in premium quarts and larger pots, bringing summer performance to any garden space.



Vinca Quasar Orange Target

Another new series is Ipomoea Sweet Georgia. It stands out from the crowd because of its uniformity. This is a true series, Steve says, not a collection. It's compact for mixes and won't take over the combo. With heart types and traditional foliage shapes in all the key colors, Sweet Georgia is bound to be a grower favorite.



Ipomoea Sweet Georgia Green Splash

We really liked the three new colors Green Fuse is adding to the Cruze Control Calibrachoa series—Blueberry Splash, Orange Splash and Yellow Delicious. This series is all about habit, with shorter internodes and large flowers, making it ideal for baskets. Also new in an existing series is Salvia Grandstand Cherry Bicolor, geared for summer heat and sure to stand out at retail.

Of course, Green Fuse also added a new fuschia to their well-known Windchimes line—Windchimes Upright Pink-Lilac. Laterals that go around and up make the upright series perfect for patio containers.

Perennial guru Paul Pilon covered most of the Spring Trials perennial intros from Green Fuse in [his last *Perennial Pulse* newsletter](#), but I have to include the Hydrangea Mountain Series in my coverage because it's so cool. Steve calls this one of the biggest breakthroughs in years. The Mountain series is part of Green Fuse's First Light perennial program because it's dayneutral and requires no vernalization. In as little as 11 to 12 weeks, growers can take these hydrangeas from URC to gallon. The series starts with four colors.



Hydrangea Mountain Pink Picotee

Last, but not least from Green Fuse, are some new Rex begonias. The Bewitched series is super-uniform for growers with a bushy, strong habit and is one of the fastest to finish Rex begonias on the market. With the key colors shoppers want (red, light green and bicolors), it'll make a solid premium offering. A bit more unique is the Curly series of escargot-pattern Rex begonias with ruffled foliage coming to market this year with four colors.



Rex Begonia Curly Peppermint

To see and hear about these and many more 2021 intros, check out the [ANNUALS](#) video, [PERENNIALS](#) video and [LIFESTYLE PLANTS](#) video slide shows that Steve created.



Day 4 in the can

Chris: Thanks much, Bill!

Okay, Ellen, Day 4 is in the can ... and that is NOT a reference back to our toilet seat

discussion. Remind me what's on tap for Day 5, Friday?

Ellen: Lemme check my notes ... no, that's my grocery list ... here it is: Next up is three stops: Pacific Plug & Liner, Speedling and Suncrest Nurseries. Breeders we'll write about include Terra Nova, Hem Genetics and Hishtil, plus the Sunset/Southern Living/Encore Azalea group, and more.

Chris: In other words, we're not done yet, folks! Read all of our daily adventures at www.springtrials.com. And follow us on the social platforms: Facebook at www.facebook.com/springtrials/ and [Instagram](#) @growertalksgreenprofit.

Thanks for reading! See you next time,

Chris, Ellen, Jen & Bill

Handwritten signatures of Chris, Ellen, Jen, and Bill in black ink.

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