

Day 5: The most new varieties yet!

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I assure you, we're wearing pants

Chris: Hey, Ellen!

Ellen: Oh, hey yourself!

Chris: This is Day 5 out of 6 of our virtual "This Is What We'd Have Written Had We Been There" coverage of the California Spring Trials.

Ellen: I thought we were calling it the "Pants Optional Tour" due to all the online Zoom meetings we're having with the breeders.

Chris: We were ... but that seemed to be making our devoted readers nervous. We really ARE wearing pants as we work from home, folks. We're showering and combing our hair and everything!

Ellen: True, but it's the "option" in optional. Anyhoo, let me go get some sweatpants on since you're so insistent. While I do that, tell the people what Bill will be covering today.

Chris: Please do. As for today's coverage, there's a bunch: three stops and nine exhibitors (at my count. The list is in the table of contents above, so I won't repeat it here.) I will mention that if you missed our Days 1 through 4 coverage, you can catch up at www.springtrials.com. And you can check out the videos we've been sharing from

many of the Trials at www.youtube.com/growertalks. Click on the “Spring Trials 2020” playlist. Okay, Bobblehead Bill, you’re on!

Bill: Wow, I can’t believe it’s already Day 5! We’ve seen so many innovative new varieties, but there are still plenty to come. Including today’s stops at Pacific Plug & Liner, Speedling and Suncrest Nurseries, where we saw nine companies bringing to market annuals, perennials, ornamentals and herbs. It was a busy day, but in true Bobblehead form we had plenty of fun.

Terra Nova knows perennials

Chuck Pavlich, Director of New Product Development at Terra Nova, was gracious enough to join our intrepid editorial team on Zoom to share the new intros. He says these new varieties have been trialed and tested for years and are now ready to launch. Trialing perennials is critical and some of these innovations really are breakthroughs.

First up is a new series of anemone called Satin Doll, which begins with one color, Blush. Chuck explained that the new breeding is focused on a fall anemone line that does not spread. Satin Doll is a clumper, not a runner, and trials show it blooms from July through the end of October. Available from tissue culture, plants can have up to 65 flowers the first year.



Anemone Satin Doll

Another new perennial, Brunnera Alexandria, is an improvement on Alexander’s Great, a classic variety. Alexandria has shown excellent hardiness in trials and shows off its pure silver foliage with no veins.



Brunnera Alexandria

Thanks to Chuck, the Bobbleheads can now pronounce Kniphofia (ki-ni-POFF-ee-ya), which means we can intelligently talk about their Poco series. New to the series is Citron, a nice color that matches the habit of the rest of the six-color series. Cold-tested in Minnesota, it's hardy to Zone 5 or even colder climes. In year one out of TC, it's quick growing and grower friendly.



Kniphofia Poco Citron

For a video featuring these and many more Terra Nova introductions, Click [HERE](#).

A Spire and a Starburst

Next stop at PP&L: Encore Azalea and the *Southern Living/Sunset* brands, all managed by Plant Development Services. First, Encore, a well-recognized brand at retail, so it's happy news that the line gets two new colors for 2020: Autumn Majesty and Autumn Starburst. Majesty is the first double purple variety in the collection. It stays dwarf, reaching 3 ½ ft. tall in the landscape. Starburst is similar to Sunburst, but with a much brighter color.



Encore Azalea Autumn Majesty

A selection of an old favorite, Magnolia Stellar Ruby is a *Magnolia figo*, also known as banana shrub, as the pretty flowers have the fragrance of bananas. It blooms heavily in spring and then again in the summer. It's habit makes for a nice screen hedge. Hardy to Zone 6B. It's in both the *Southern Living* and *Sunset Western Garden* Collections.



Magnolia Stellar Ruby

You know the Bobbleheads don't miss an opportunity to talk about food, and they've got our sweet tooth covered with two new blueberry intros, Bless Your Heart Rabbiteye and I Declare. Bless Your Heart is a vigorous rabbiteye type that's upright, heat tolerant and yields medium to large berries with great flavor, firmness and shelf life. I Declare is more ornamental and offers year-round interest even with no fruit. Early spring blooms are fragrant,

followed by tons of berries and foliage then its foliage turns dark red in fall. These are in both the *Southern Living* and *Sunset* collections. Here's a [VIDEO SLIDE SHOW](#) of these and a few more.

Interspecific delphinium? Why not!

Our host for this stop, Pacific Plug & Liner, always shows off some nice perennials. Here's a new one to us, and probably to you, too: An interspecific delphinium! Called Delgenius, it was bred by Bart Noordius, the same Dutchman who brought us the interspecific Echibeckias and the very nice FrostKiss Helleborus collection.

What's the benefit of being interspecific? "Enormous" hardiness and heat tolerance, we're told, along with strong flower stems that hold up in the garden. Habit is compact and multi-branched, and plants will rebloom if cut back. Hardy to Zones 3-9, meaning pretty much everywhere. The collection has three colors: Breezin' (purple), Juliette (pink) and Shelby (lilac). They're from tissue culture, which might sound expensive, but they're "reasonably priced," we're told, and they'll have much fewer problems than seed types, potentially giving you more yield at a lower cost.



Delphinium Delgenius Shelby

In the aforementioned echibeckias, add two more: Summerina Sunchaser and Summerina Sunreef. Sunchaser represents the newest breeding in the series, selected for bigger, brighter flowers in yellow-orange tones. The blooms are nearly 8 in. across! Sunreef is more of a bicolor orange-red and has a larger habit with 6-in. blooms.



Echibeckia Summerina Sunchaser

Last but not least is Lavender EverGreat Blue. This *L. stoechas* (Spanish, or French) lavender lives up to its name with huge flowers that get an "oh my gosh" reaction when growers see it in trials. It has shown excellent reblooming if trimmed back after early flowering.



Lavender EverGreat Blue

We didn't mention the new hellebores that PP&L showed, but you can see them in [THIS VIDEO](#) featuring April Herring Murray.

A truly tiny freesia

Flamingo Holland has released a genetically miniature freesia series within its already-compact Nano series called Nano Micro with extra-compact, uniform 5- to 6-in. plants. Requiring no PGRs, this three-color series works well in 4-in. pots, which could open up a new market option for growers. They showed us three colors: Lucca (pale yellow), Torino (white) and Verona (pink).



Freesia Micro Nano Verona

Also new is the first color in a perennial primula series called OakLeaf. OakLeaf Yellow Picotee keeps its flowers for almost two months, held high above the oak-like foliage. There will be at least one more color coming in this Zone 4-hardy series next year.



Primula OakLeaf Yellow Picotee

You can see OakLeaf and several other introductions in [THIS VIDEO](#) featuring Flamingo Holland's Jonathan Cooper.

A big year for Hem's lines

In a normal year, we would have headed to the Speedling greenhouses near San Juan Bautista and met up with Hem Genetics. This year, via Zoom, Joe Messer explained that one of Hem's key breeding goals these days is expanding on their first-year-flowering perennial lineup.

One example is lavender. They're popular in current breeding and coming to market fast and furious. So, to grab attention from growers, they must be differentiated. *Lavender multifida* Torch Minty Ice stands out with its light blue to lilac color on tall, wispy stems. It's a complement to Torch Blue. It would look great as a back border or even as a centerpiece in containers. It has an oregano-like scent and is hardy to Zones 7-11.



Lavender Torch Minty Ice

The new Lupini series is a seed-raised, first-year-flowering lupine with foot-tall blooms. They're hardy in Zones 6 to 8 and have a short crop time, requiring no vernalization. The new series has five colors—Blue Shades, Pink Shades, Red Shades, White Shades, Yellow Shades—and a Mix.



Lupine Lupini series

Finally, let's get weird with an edible perennial. Oysterplant Silver Ocean is a species native to coastal Newfoundland, *Mertensia maritima*, which can serve multiple purposes in the garden as an edible ornamental. Use it as a hardy perennial in rock gardens for its blue-green foliage and blue, bell-shaped flowers and then eat the leaves for a crunchy treat that tastes like oysters.

In annuals, Hem's F1 antirrhinum series Snappy gets three new colors: Cherry, Pink and Rose Bicolor. And a whole new series for Hem is Cosmos Cassanova, a genetically compact cosmos requiring no PGRs. With four colors (Pink, Red, Violet, White) plus a Mix, it's well suited for 4- and 6-in. pots or premium packs.

Lastly, in another edible ornamental, all of the Bobbleheads liked the new Basil Purple Ball, a Fleuroselect Gold winner that requires no pinch and no PGRs. It has a great globe shape and only gets about a foot tall. Ellen, our resident chef, thought it would be good in a vinaigrette or sprinkled as an accent on your savory dishes.



Basil Purple Ball

A new boug from Vista Farms



We always hope for a new bougainvillea from Vista Farms, the Puerto Rican breeder/grower, and Jerome O'Neill delivered again with VF Garnet. Jerome says it's a sport of the very popular commercial variety Helen Johnson, but with orangy-pink bracts instead of pure pink. It's got the same super-compact and free-flowering habit that makes it perfect as a groundcover in tropical landscapes. Of course, you can use it as an annual patio plant in colder climates.



Bougainvillea Vista Farms Garnet

Heavy into herbs

Our final stop of the day would have been Suncrest Nurseries, where (again, via Zoom) we caught up with Israeli breeders and propagators Hishtil and Cohen. (Alas, a representative from Jaldety wasn't available, as they were just heading into the Passover season.) These three companies always exhibit together at CAST and offer myriad herbs, annuals and perennials.

Ellen: Hey, Bill! I'll do the stuff from Hishtil, since they're heavy into herbs—which, in my book, count as veggies and since I'm doing the veggies for this tour ...

Bill: I get the connection. Fine with me!

Ellen: Before I get into their new varieties, Eyal Inbar told us that despite the worldwide pandemic, Hishtil is still doing good business in Europe because their veg and herb lines are still in demand at the grocery stores. So, silver lining there.

Now to the varieties. The one that got my attention the most was a basil called Coldasil. As you might infer from the name, this variety is cold tolerant (or less sensitive to cold, I should say), down to 10C, or 50F—perhaps a bit less, he said. Basil is usually cold sensitive, both in the garden and in the fridge. Also note that Eyal said it's not a genovese type. What type is it? Not sure at the moment, but maybe I could get my hands on a sample (hint, hint).

They've got a new tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*) called Tolergon, where that "Toler" refers to tolerance. It has a wider and stronger leaf leading to better pot performance and more tolerance of weather. Tolergon also has a less potent anise flavor, which is good news for cooks (if you've ever added too much tarragon to a dish, as I have, you'll understand).



Tarragon Tolergon

I'm also psyched for a new dark green-leaved rosemary, Inguano, from northern Italy. Its northern Italian roots make it a bit more cold hardy, down to 0C (32F) they say, possibly to Zone 7. Maybe I'll finally be able to overwinter rosemary now.

And who doesn't like an edible that does double duty as an ornamental? Thyme Sparkling Bright keeps its green-and-white variegation all year long. Expect fun little pinkish flowers in summer. Vigorous, upright growth with one pinch.



Thyme Sparkling Bright

Speaking of ornamentals, Hishtil does a bunch of those, too. They have more than 50 varieties of lavender, with the all-new BeeZee *L. angustifolia* series being their latest. It's bred by the famous David Kerley so it's got some chops and is uniform throughout. Great for 4-in. to 6 ½-in. pot and pack production. For larger pots, try mixing up some of their five different colors. Keep in mind this'll need vernalization. Zone 5.

And finally another lavender series called Libelle, a stoechas type. It's a compact, early flowering item with some big bracts and flower heads. Three colors—Compact Blue, Compact Rose and Purple, which is a little taller than the other two. No vernalization needed for this Zone 8 plant.

Bill, thanks for allowing me to squeeze in a few ornamentals there at the end. Now, take it away!

Fruit Salad and Summer Bird

Bill: Thanks, Ellen! I'll take the wheel again. Cohen never disappoints when it comes to cool genetics and we really liked the all-new breeding that completely upgrades two existing snapdragon series—Fruit Salad Classic and Fruit Salad Up. Classic is a hanging basket type with five colors that are uniform with equal growth and flower size, ready for market faster than in years past. They flower all summer long in Orange, Wine, Yellow, Pink and White. The Up series has an upright habit (probably didn't need to tell you that) and is ideal for pot production. Four colors in the series: White, Purple, Yellow and Apricot.



Snapdragon Fruit Salad Classic White

Next we saw Buddleja Summer Bird, bred by Volmary, a new line for Cohen. This is a more compact series, growing up to 2 ft. tall, making it perfect for patio pots and window boxes. All four colors (Violet, White, Magenta and Blue) show resistance to powdery mildew.



Buddleja Summer Bird White

Ping Pong, anyone?

While we didn't get to Zoom with anyone from Jaldety, they did provide some literature and lots of photos, and we're working from that. Of interest to us are the new salvias. I think they introduced six for 2020-21. Two of my favorites were Amigo and Ping Pong.

Amigo will make a great companion for two existing salvias, Amistad and Amante. It's a tender perennial that produces spikes of large, two-tone violet and pink flowers with black calyces blooming from spring until first frost. It's heat and humidity tolerant and can be trimmed back to bloom again. Versatile, it can be used in pots, combos, borders and beds.



Salvia Amigo

Ping Pong not only has a fun name, it's a cool little *S. microphylla* hybrid with tons of large raspberry-pink flowers. It's a pollinator magnet, water wise and deer resistant—three consumer benefits to promote.



Salvia Ping Pong

Other salvias on Jaldety's intro list for this year are Royal Bumble, Mauve Lips and Dayglow (three *S. greggii* hybrids) and an *S. nemorosa* called Caradonna Pink. Chris made this [VIDEO SLIDE SHOW](#) from Jaldety's photos—check it out! He's gotten pretty good with the Ken Burns effect.

Okay, Chris and Ellen, back to you in the studio!

One more day!

Chris: Whew! That might have been our biggest day yet ... but Monday (Day 6) brings three more big Trials: Benary, Danziger and Syngenta. You ready for that, Ellen?

Ellen: Do I have a choice?

Chris: No. Same time, same place, and come loaded for bear with your best nouns, verbs and adjectives ... and not the ones you are thinking right now!

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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