California Spring Trials 2024 Day 1: The Ball Companies



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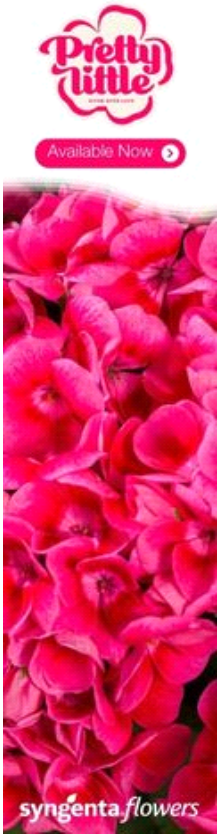
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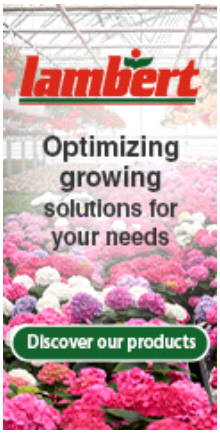
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Acres of buzz from California Trials

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Kicking It Off

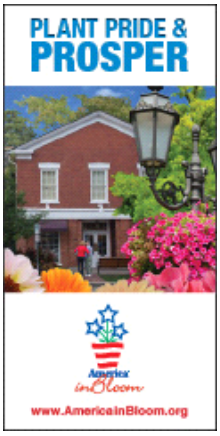
CHECK OUT OUR 2024 CALIFORNIA SPRING TRIALS VIDEO PLAYLIST!

Chris Beytes: Young William! Can you believe we're back out in California looking at flowers together yet again? I believe our first time doing Pack Trials together was 2005, just one day after I hired you.

Bill Calkins: That's a fact, boss! And it was a fun trip that not only made me immediately feel a part of Ball Publishing, but also kicked off our friendship—a week on the road with your new boss could have gone either way ...









Chris: And it was in 2006, if memory serves, that I had the bright idea that after working all day we could sit down in a restaurant or bar, enjoy a refreshing beverage and recap the day's events, sending it out as a newsletter. Little did we know what a monster we'd create, complete with videos, social media and 18-hour workdays.

Bill: I wouldn't call it a monster—because you know we love it. At least most of the time. And now we have the lovely Jen Zurko and video wizard Osvaldo Cuevas with us to share in the fun.

Chris: When they said, "The more, the merrier," they were thinking of us. But hold on a second, let me welcome the folks to what the heck they're reading before they delete us ... Folks, this is our annual coverage of the California Spring Trials. What we do is visit the trials all day, taking photos and notes, shooting videos and posting random interesting tidbits to our Instagram and Facebook accounts, and then we hole up in a hotel room for five or six hours after dinner, trying to make sense of it all. Our goal: Cut through the marketing hype and tell you what's important in the world of annuals and perennials for 2025. With luck, we hit "Send" on all the words and YouTube videos by about midnight, go to bed and do it all over again the next day for five days straight. If we don't kill each other or have nervous breakdowns, that is.

Bill: Nah, we wouldn't want it any other way. I'm actually pretty excited to start covering day one. Let's go! Pick a company and variety, and jump into it.



Ball FloraPlant Goes Interspecific

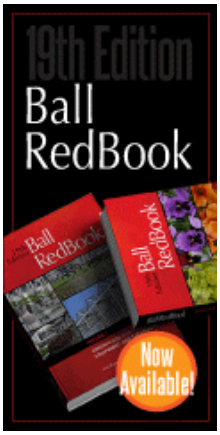
Ball FloraPlant VIDEO

Chris: Today, as you saw in the top, was exclusively Ball companies, all of which occupy the PanAmerican Seed facility in Santa Paula, about an hour and a half north of Los Angeles. It's one of the biggest single stops of the whole trip and there's no way we can cover all 120 varieties (at our rough count). So, Bill, let's hit the top three or four, and maybe an honorable mention or two from each of the breeding companies.

Bill: Sounds like a plan! I'm going to start with a heavy hitter from vegetative breeding company Ball FloraPlant—a new series of interspecific geraniums (the first from BFP) called Solera. It's no secret who's the industry leader, and getting into this class required some strategy ...

Chris: That would be Syngenta's Calliope series ...

Bill: Yep, exactly. And BFP explained that their new Solera series is extremely uniform across all colors and cuttings produced at their new Mexican facility YecaFlora will be trucked to the U.S. border, keeping the cold chain intact, before shipping out to growers across North America.





Chris: In other words, they're going for high uniformity of habit and timing, plus availability, as their competitive advantage.

Bill: That's their plan! They launched Solera with five colors— Red, Lavender, Fuchsia, Orange and Watermelon. Dark Red is coming soon, I bet.

Chris: Here's an interesting one: Ageratum Monarch Magic. First, a vegetative ageratum ... one of only what—two or three on the market? Which means more vigor than the typical seed ageratum. And they tout it as trailing, even showing it in hanging baskets. And the name indicates its pollinator-friendliness. They even have a logo and some stickers for those who want to promote it on their social channels.



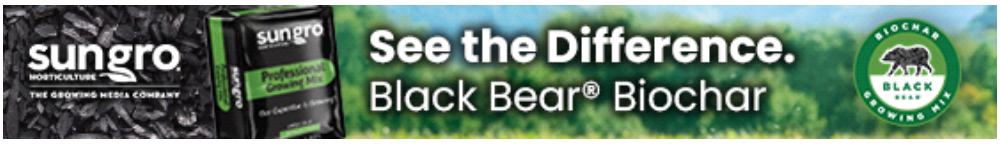
Bill: I'll skip the AC/DC references, but my favorite single variety from BFP is a black angelonia called AngelFlare Black. There are three total in the new AngelFlare series, including Cranberry and Orchid Pink ... but Black is the standout. The series has an upright, V-shaped habit.

Chris: Don't forget to mention their new extra-tall Guardian Angel series—30% more vigorous than Archangel, they say, and finishes earlier, with huge flowers. Starts in two colors—Blue and Berry Sparkle. Any honorable mentions, Young William?



Bill: I can do that. We can't move on to the next company without giving a shout out to BFP for reorganizing their mandevilla/dipladenia assortment under the "Tropica" umbrella, under which are

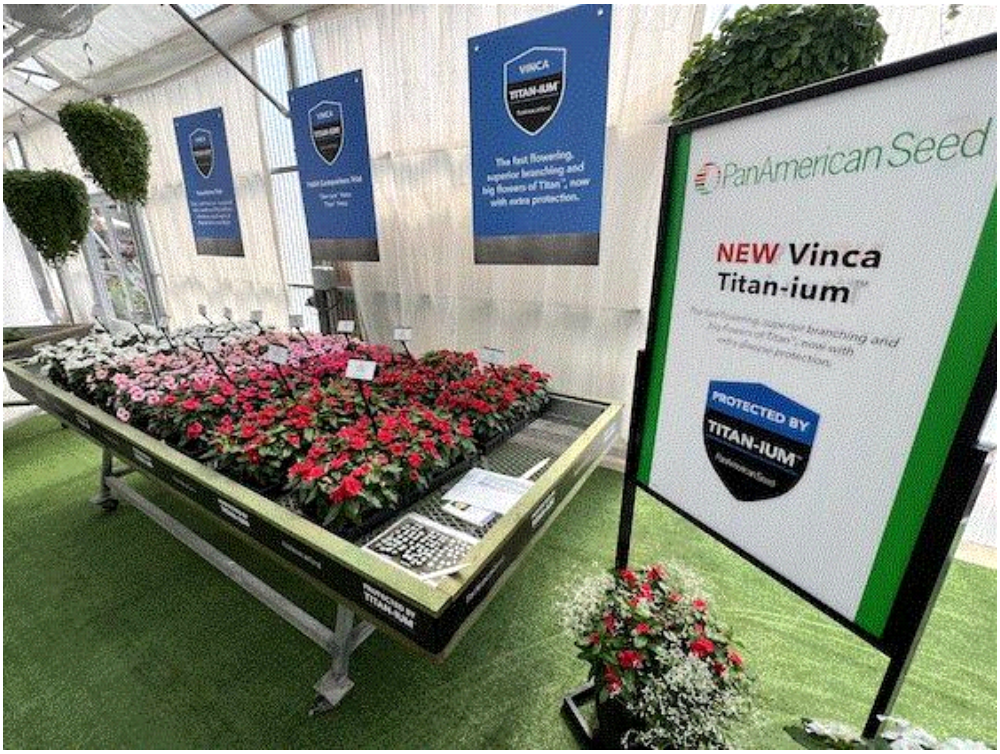
four series and one collection. I'll run them down quickly: Modesto is the compact, bush dipladenia type with Pink, Red and White. Medio is medium-bush with Strawberry, Red and White. Grande is medium-vining with Pink, Red, Merlot and an improved Citrine. And Grandiosa is the large, vining mandevilla series with Rose Pink and White. Lastly, a collection of novelties called Unico with Fuchsia, Pink, Coral Orange Sunrise and Pink + Yellow.



Next up: Seed varieties from PanAmerican Seed

PamAmerican Seed VIDEO

Chris: Seed is still one of the best ways to bring cool flowers to market, as PanAmerican hopes to prove with their new Vinca Titan-ium series. Clever name, as it starts with their well-known Titan Vinca series, which has been toughened up with the addition of aerial Phytophthora resistance to become Titan-ium. The series did well in a disease inoculum test they displayed. Is it as tough as class leader Cora? Time in the landscape will tell us. The series starts with seven colors and a mix.



Bill: Yes! You left me wide open to cover the famous Wave Petunias! Not only were Waves on display at the Grammy Awards this year, but PanAm recreated the red carpet (but in pink) and all sorts of Hollywood-style fanfare. But the stars of the show were the plants—new intros in Easy Wave and Easy Wave E3. Easy Wave adds Rose and Navy Velour, and E3 gains Rose Morn and three mixes.



Chris: I need a smoking jacket in the color of Navy Velour ... and I think I already own some socks in the fantastic colors of Osteospermum Akila Hawaii Sunset Mixture. This was my pick item of the whole trial for its tropical sunset range of shades. It's from seed and part of the Akila series (below), but WOW! The shades of yellow, orange and purple are fantastic. There was a large bed of them as we came in that caught everybody's eye.



Bill: Let's talk PanAm veggies for a minute. With all of the new breeding coming out of their Hand Picked program, it was time to reorganize things a bit to help growers select the best varieties for different uses. Now you can find four categories: Kitchen Minis (for indoor, window sill growing); Groundbreakers (best for in-ground use); Basket Bites (yes, for hanging baskets); and

Patio Picks (ideal for pots and containers). You can find them all in a **NEW CATALOG**.



Chris: Got any honorable mentions, Bill?

Bill: I have two. The Dianthus Dart series was cool—super compact without PGRs (compared to Dianthus Dash from PanAm) and looks like a nice container plant in six colors. And new additions to the SolarScape interspecific seed series—for both the standard size (White and Pearl) and the XLs (Lilac Spark and Pink Jewel). Pink Jewel is actually an All-America Selections winner for containers and landscapes.



Chris: Admit it, you wanted to bring home that 4-ft. long dart they used in the display for your office.

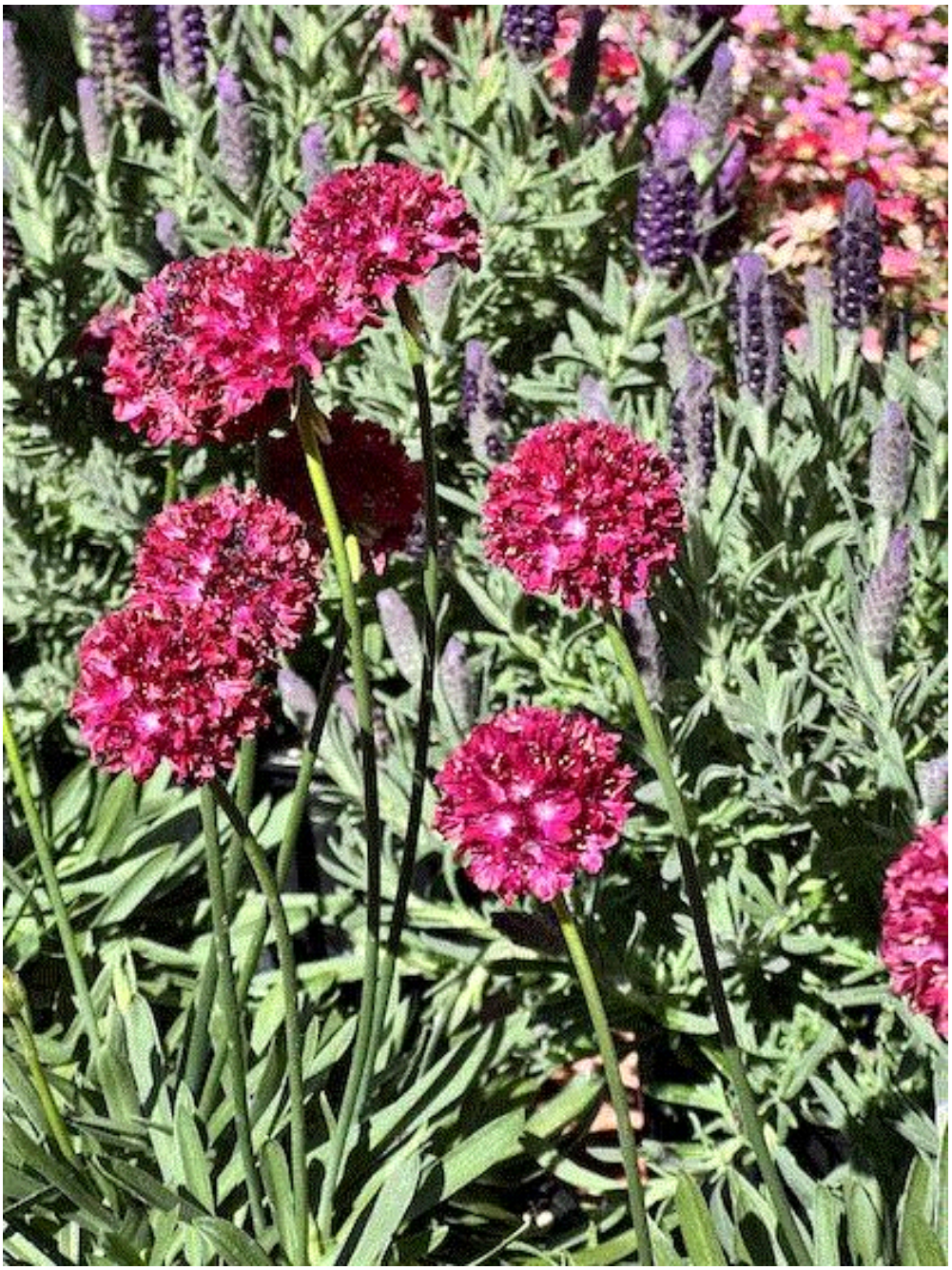
Bill: You bet I did! It would be tough to hit triple-20s with, though.



Perennials from Darwin

Chris: Darwin Perennials now has 15 years as part of Ball, and to celebrate they're going beyond the first-year flowering perennials for which they've become known and are going traditional—as in stick cuttings in June, bulk up all fall, overwinter to induce flowering, then sell in the spring. To get the traditional perennial ball rolling, they start with an interspecific phlox called Spring Splash. It blooms later and longer than the regular *P. subulata*, they say. The collection starts with three pinks: Pink, Lilac and Violet. Also new in the traditional perennials is Saxifraga Marto, with four colors; and Armeria Dreamaria Hypnotic Dream, with ruby red golf-ball flowers held on stiff stems.





Bill: Here's where I remind our readers to click on the video links at the end of each company in our newsletters. When you watch the Darwin video, you'll see me run down all of the "color breakthroughs" they showed. These are what we might call "line extensions" or color additions to key series. Watch the video to see them all. A few highlights for me were Coreopsis Uptick Gold, Echinacea Sombrero Mandarin Mambo and Fuchsia Fandango, and Digitalis Arctic Fox Lemon Cream. Why don't you tell folks about the lavenders?

Chris: Certainly! The Anouk collection of Spanish lavender gets an upgrade with Royal Anouk, which was selected for needing less chilling requirement, plus larger flowers and bigger flags. There's also a Burgundy Anouk; and Doublescape, which has frilly double flags. And if you're looking for something with silver foliage (and who isn't?), try Lavender Lavinnia Frost Pink and Frost Purple.

Honorable mention, Bill?



Bill: That's easy ... the new Agastache Summerlong series was displayed on a giant paint palette, showing that the colors can be used to create art in the garden. The five colors (Coral, Lemon, Lilac, Magenta and Peach) are extremely uniform for landscapes or even big patio pots all time to bloom together. As the name implies, they flower all season, spring through fall.



Veggies from Burpee

Chris: Bill, I think it was the first year we traveled together that we started seeing vegetables displayed at Pack Trials. Floranova, maybe? Remember?

Bill: It could have been and it's because they always sell and there are endless varieties being bred. I know ... I've tasted them all.

Chris: Anyway, they're staples of many breeding programs now and Burpee is the oldest name in the business. This year, they're offering a basil, a pair of peppers, a trio of tomatoes, and another trio of squashes.

Most notable, I think, is Unicorn cherry tomato in Red and Pink. Why Unicorn, we asked? Because a pink cherry tomato is as rare as one, they answered. Plus, both colors are crack-resistant. And there's nothing worse than having a big crop of cherry tomatoes ripening nicely only to have them all split and crack after a rain storm.



Bill: Disease is also a nightmare and a lot of the new vegetable breeding has been targeting common garden challenges, like bacterial leaf spot (BLS). The Pepper Sweet Canyon series of red, orange and yellow features big, blocky bell peppers that are resistant to all 10 races of BLS.

Chris: Vegetables are great, but give me a good basil plant any day. Basil Everleaf Lemon is a tasty new offering, featuring smallish leaves on an upright plant that’s late to bloom, giving you lots of bright-flavored pesto.



Bill: I've always considered pesto a vegetable ...

Chris: And I've always liked vegetables on the grill, so Squash Golden Griller and Green Griller are for me! These are "hand-sized," meaning good for individual portions.

Okay, Bill, take us on to Ball's other vegetative annual breeder, Selecta One.



Selecta One North America

Selecta One VIDEO

Bill: My pleasure. When I think of Selecta, calibrachoa always comes to mind. Of course, we saw some new MiniFamous intros, like Uno (medium, compact) Funtopia Pink and Funtopia Blue (below), Ember Eclipse, Double Orange and Double Red, as well as the stunning Neo (medium vigor) Red Shuffle, with its vivid red petals with a yellow star and yellow flecks.



But I think I was most impressed by the new Evo series of double-flowered and super compact plants perfect for color bowls. The series starts with five colors—White, Red, Yellow, Magenta and Blue.



Chris: Since it was in the entrance to the greenhouse, they must be putting emphasis on their dianthus program that started when they received the OK to bring in unrooted cuttings from offshore with no quarantine period. That opens up the market for pot carnations for holidays from Valentine's Day through Mother's Day. They've got loads of colors and plenty of POP to help you sell a program to retail, from florists to grocery stores. They even showed photo examples from some of their growers.



Bill: Selecta has a bunch of dahlias and I know they spent a lot of time a few years ago putting the assortment together to hit pretty much all retail specs. Now, they can add varieties into each one and growers know how to use them. In the Dalaya series, three new colors—Apricot+Red Eye, Lavender and an improved Red+Yellow Eye. For the dark-leaf City Lights series, Apricot

Glow was introduced. And in the larger Venti series, there's a new Magenta+White Eye.



Morel Cyclamen

Chris: This French company brings the ooh la la with their pretty cyclamen, which are exclusive in North America to Ball Seed. Along with some color additions to existing series, they have an all-new line called Petit Moulin, or "Little Windmill" for the windmill-like double flowers. They say the flowers are almost pollenless, which generally means longer-lasting—in this case, giving the flowers a shelf life of 100 days, they say—66% longer than the 60-day average of most cyclamen. Impressive! The series starts with a mix of pink and orchid shades.



Bill: A few years ago, Morel introduced the Indiaka series, a "midi" type with fun, two-tone blooms. This year, they added Red, which would make an awesome Christmas plant. The color is perfect and with a long shelf life, they'd hold up throughout the season at retail.



Wrapping up Day 1

Chris: Whew! Day 1 was a whirlwind—a moulin of a day! But I think we've got the hang of it again after a year away. Day 2 gives us Green Fuse Botanicals, which includes displays by Hem Genetics, Beekenkamp, Schoneveld and Westhoff; and then the Santa Barbara Polo Club, where we will see Pacific Plug & Liner, Southern Living/Sunset, PlantHaven and Suntory. Another full day, Young William!

Bill: Today was a blast! I can never complain about walking around greenhouses full of industry friends checking out new plants. Sure, the days are long and tiring, but worth every minute. Just having the opportunity to share what we see with people across North America and around the world keeps us all energized.

Chris: See you tomorrow! And feel free to click our names below to comment, ask questions or tell us how much you love our coverage. And watch the videos—there's some crazy stuff in there!

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Thanks for reading! See you tomorrow!

Chris, Jen, Bill & Osvaldo



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