2024 California Spring Trials Day 2: Green Fuse Botanicals & Santa Barbara Polo Club (9 Companies)



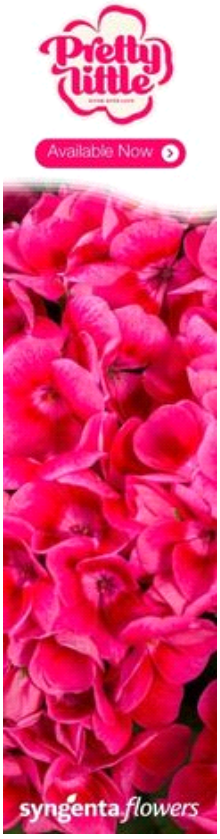
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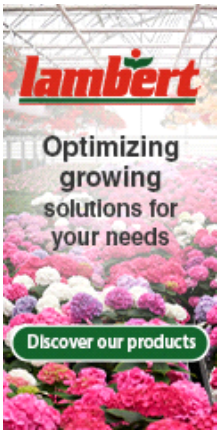
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Acres of buzz from California Trials

IN THIS EDITION

California Spring Trials Day 2
- Green Fuse Botanicals
- Hem Genetics
- Westhoff
- Beekenkamp
- Schoneveld
- Plant Haven
- Suntory
- PDSI





The Bobbleheads Are Back In Town!

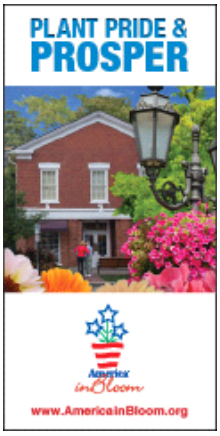
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Bill: It's Day 2, Bossman, and I'm ready to go! Yesterday was action-packed, with six companies at one stop. Today, we have two stops—with *nine* companies on the agenda. I do like when multiple breeders with a wide range of products share space because you never know what you're going to find.

Chris: They were multicultural stops, too, with breeders or plant companies representing the US, Germany, England, Japan and the Netherlands. Plus, Mexican food for lunch! We've got plenty of







fodder for this newsletter and today's videos. Speaking of videos ...

Bill: We had tons of fun with our videos yesterday. If our readers didn't have a chance to watch our escapades from Day 1, I have to encourage them to click the link at the top and get into the YouTube playlist.

Chris: You must be thinking of our public service video from PanAmerican Seed. Or the Grammy red ... er, pink carpet incident.

Bill: Like I said, fun stuff. But information-filled! Anyway, today was busy, so we'd better get started. Our first stop of the day was Green Fuse Botanicals. Why don't you start us off and maybe explain the company and some of the history behind the breeding.

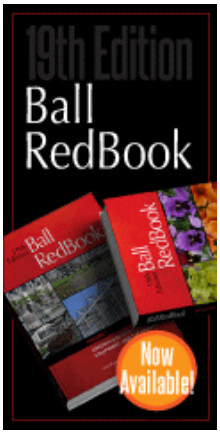


Fun Genetics at Green Fuse

GREEN FUSE VIDEO

Chris: Green Fuse started from what was Bodger Botanicals (which was Bodger Seed) when Steve Jones purchased all the vegetative varieties from that company. Since then, he's added scores of exclusive varieties from around the world, plus their own breeding. They've got annuals, first-year-flowering perennials, potted plants and unusual landscape plants, like anigozanthos from Australia. But let me start with a couple of perennials: rudbeckia and leucanthemum. New this year is Rudbeckia Dakota Double Red. This is an *L. hirta* species, but from genetics found in Colorado, I believe we were told, giving it extra cold tolerance—to Zone 5. As the name implies, flowers are double and a nice deep red. Leucanthemum Kilimanjaro has massive white flowers. It was selected to be later to bloom than their very early variety Betsy, but





still with big flowers. Looks like Steve Jones achieved his goal.



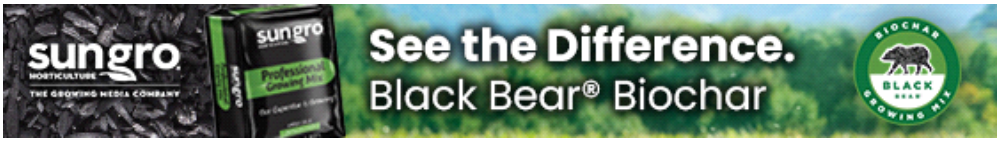
Bill: When I asked Steve what his favorite introduction was, he quickly took us to see Hydrangea Game Changer, which we could easily spot from across the greenhouse. The collection isn't technically new, but now the supply is built up and ready to go. New for 2025 is Giant Pink, with huge light pink blooms. I was impressed that from a direct-stuck liner, growers can have 2-gal. pots ready for sale in nine weeks and huge baskets in 28 weeks. Since Game Changer is an interspecific cross, it has excellent drought tolerance, he said.

Chris: The reason it's called Game Changer? Because it needs no vernalization and it's daylength neutral, meaning liners don't have to be shipped to Canada or something for chilling in order to bloom.

Bill: Proving there's still need for good component plants, Green Fuse showed additions to the Sweet Georgia Ipomoea (sweet potato) collection. Fine Lime and Fine Burgundy have thinner foliage, while Pulse Black is a larger dark leaf.

Chris: Lastly, tissue culture. Green Fuse has their own lab and they want to make use of it, so expect more of their products to be available in TC. New offerings include a robust, deep red *Cordyline australis* called Panic Burgundy. Use it as a spike in a combo or in the landscape. Hosta Old Yeller is their first hosta; it sports yellow-green foliage that holds its color. And a favorite of everyone, I'm sure, is a pair of big, bold echeveria called Coral Reef—Aqua and Dark Chocolate. Remember the Under the Sea Coleus? These would look great with them!





Hem Genetics Shakes it Up

HEM GENETICS VIDEO

Bill: By now we know Dutch breeder Hem for their Mambo and Limbo series of multiflora and grandiflora compact petunias from seed, and this year they shook things up a bit—literally. Their new Shake series fits in between the other two in terms of size, but brings novelty colors in—the sort you only see with vegetative petunias, they say. The series starts with Blueberry, Strawberry and Raspberry. Like nearly all the other Hem genetics, they're naturally compact, needing no PGRs.



Chris: That applies to their new ageratum and dianthus, too. Last year, they introduced Kona Blue Ageratum; this year, the series gets Kona White. Diana Dianthus gets upgraded to Diana Pro—again, to be more genetically compact and mounding in habit, while still having the same flowering time as the original Diana—15 weeks. And not naturally compact (but still not needing PGRs) is their DoubleShot snapdragons, which grow to about 24 in. in the garden. The series gets a new Yellow Red Heart (alas, it wasn't in bloom to share a photo with you).



Crazy Times with Westhoff

WESTHOFF VIDEO

Chris: Clever title you wrote for this section, Bill. I see what you did there.

Bill: I always expect to see some of the most unique color patterns of petunias and calibrachoas when we catch up with the Westhoff team, and this year didn't disappoint. One of their feature displays was for Caliloco, a new collection of calibrachoa selected in the same vein as their Crazytunias—wild colors and patterns. Calilocos starts with12 new colors and six classics from previous collections.



Chris: Speaking of Crazytunias, they continue to add new ones ... I think they said the line is up to 58 now! Talk about crazy. Additions include Citrus Hill and Secred Star. And, yes, that's spelled right—it's a combination of secret and red. And you know the retina-burning Hells collection of petunias? It gets a Red ... no, check that. Hells THE RED! I guess they figure nothing will ever get more red.



Bill: A key display right at the entrance to their trial featured a new tuberous begonia series named Beaugonia. A nice selection of big, frilly flowers in nine strong colors from their own breeding. But the series has an interesting connection to Rieger, the German breeder of the famous Rieger begonias. Rieger will be producing URCs of Beaugonia. With more than 100

flights to North America from Frankfurt, availability shouldn't be a problem.

Chris: A hot series—literally—from Westhoff is the Hot Lobelias, which hold up in the heat, as well or better than any lobelia. These are their number one-selling crop. HotPot is a more compact, mounding version of Hots; it gets a new Purple. And a sister addition is Stratus Blue Picotee, said to be the first picotee-flowers lobelia. We can't say we've seen another.



Bill: I'll wrap up Westhoff by mentioning the new salvia hybrid series, Tanami, with six colors. Though technically a perennial, Westhoff crossed *S. greggii* with something that helped make it daylength neutral with no vernalization, basically turning it into an annual for late-season shoulder sales.





Getting Experimental with Beekenkamp

BEEKENKAMP VIDEO

Chris: Beekenkamp is well-known for begonias, but we weren't shown any this year. Instead, one series they highlighted was Petunia Tea, which they've sold for years. It's not originally from their own breeding, but now their breeders are adding to the line. They showed several experimentals that they'll launch next year, they say. The focus? Tight, mounding habit and disease resistance.

Bill: Beekenkamp is in the dahlia game big time and I remember their huge displays from the past couple years. The new intros fit right into their organized assortment of Labella Dahlias. The Medio series for 5- to 6-in. pots picks up Fun Flame (Fun indicating an unusual color or flower form); Maggiore for 8- to 10-in. pots gains Pomegranate (below); and Grande for gal.-sized pots gets new Coral.



All of Beekenkamp’s Labella Dahlias are bred for strong stems, unique colors and six or seven flushes of new flowers.



No Illusions at Schoneveld

SCHONEVELD VIDEO

Chris: The last of the companies sharing space at Green Fuse's greenhouse is Dutch breeder Schoneveld. The highlight of their display was floating on a fun magnetic turntable suspended by magnets in thin air. Illusia is a mini cyclamen with unusual open, upside-down flowers. I'm not quite sure how else to describe them. You'll just have to look at the picture below. There's just one color right now and it's slated for a 2026 launch. Oh, they're trying to not call it a cyclamen; they want it to be known as Illusia. We'll see if it sticks.



Bill: Schoneveld doesn't just play in the cyclamen sandbox, they also have gerberas. New for 2025 is their Joybera series with eight single-flowered colors and three doubles. Joybera were selected to have a tight one-week flowering window. Seed germination is said to be 90%. These

are ideal for 4- to 6-in. pots.



Chris: Fusion is a large-flowered cyclamen with two-tone blooms. It gets a new Neon Pink. And they said next year they'll have a midi-sized version of Fusion. Another tease they gave us was a launch they're scheduling for Cultivate in July called Dragon. A blue cyclamen? That's what the picture indicated. Was it Photoshopped? Created by AI? Or real? We'll have to swing by their Cultivate booth to see!

Bill: That's enough work for today, boss. Let's go play some polo! You did pack your polo pony, right?



PlantHaven's Eclectic Assortment

PLANTHAVEN VIDEO

Chris: I assume you're referring to stop two of Day 2, the Santa Barbara Polo & Racket Club, where PlantHaven shares big tents with several other breeders. And, yes, while I'd like nothing more than getting in a brisk chukka or two, we do have work to do, starting with the aforementioned PlantHaven, which finds and distributes genetics from all around the world. Including Hawaii, where they get colocasia from the University of Hawaii. New to the Royal Hawaiian line is Hawaiian Luau, and it's safe to say it's the biggest edible plant we've ever seen. All colocasia tubers are edible when cooked, as far as I know; this one has tubers that are extra good for slicing and frying to make taro chips. We just wish they'd had some on hand for us to try!



Bill: It seems like appealing to the senses continues to be a theme when companies are selecting new intros. PlantHaven has a series of nemesia aptly named (and spelled) Escential. This year, they're adding Passionberry. It has tricolor blooms with yellow and purple and a gold center and a strong, nice fragrance. I think it's a collaboration with Westhoff, right?

Chris: Right! Westhoff is helping out with the marketing of Escential, which is why we saw it in their trial, too. Sticking with your fragrance theme is dianthus Electric Dreams from well-known breeder Whetman Pinks of the UK. The habit is tidy and the flowers have an interesting, precise pattern. Bill, how about an honorable mention from PlantHaven?



Bill:I liked Salvia Vibe Ignition Orange because it seems like a cool, vibrant addition to a series that already has four colors (Purple, Fuchsia, Cranberry and Sunrise). But the coolest thing to me is that the long flower stems are flexible, making them easy to ship without breaking.



Suntory’s Tropical Award-Winners

SUNTORY VIDEO

Chris: Sharing tent pace at the Polo Grounds is Japanese breeder Suntory, which showed five of their popular Sun Parasol Dipladenia. I’ve written about these before, when they debuted at TPIE in Ft. Lauderdale in January. Sun Parasol Bluephoria has pretty blue flowers (they looked more mauve here due to temperature); FiredUp Orange has an upright habit, narrow leaves and vivid orange flowers; Mauvelous offers speckled two-tone flowers and the best habit of any Sun Parasol; and Double Pink Blush has double flowers. Oh, and Sundenia Red Improved is not just an improvement, they say; it’s really a major upgrade to the line.



Bill: Maybe not as tropical, but just as showstopping is the newest Senetti Pericallis, Blue Spoon. The unique flower form brings out the contrasting blue-and-white colors and comes from the new breeding direction Suntory is following—better stock plants, disease resistance, better branching and higher flower counts.



Chris: Another noteworthy upgrade is to the Soiree Catharanthus collection. These small-flowered vinca are getting a full overhaul to improve the whole series. Upgrades include Pink Improved, Orchid Improved and a new addition to the series, Pure White.



Flowers & Foliage from PDSI

PDSI VIDEO

Chris: PDSI stands for Plant Development Services Inc, and company that brands and distributes quality genetics. Their best-known brands are Encore Azalea and, the Sunset and Southern Living Magazine brands—into which the following introductions fall.

Bill: I'll cover the new yucca and leave the Florida tropical for you, boss. Yucca Nice & Easy has a couple of attributes that take traditional yuccas up a notch. First, it has a beautiful pink tone in the foliage when temps are cooler, giving it a unique look. Next, it's actually soft and not sticky like other yuccas. But don't be fooled by the photos: it's not a small plant, growing up to 5-ft. tall.



Chris: This is one of my favorites from the trials at the Polo Grounds: Agapanthus Blackjack. This tropical lily, bred in South Africa, has deep purple flowers that are almost black. It received international accolades when the Royal Horticultural Society named it their Plant of the Year for 2023. It also makes a great patio tropical that's easy to overwinter in a garage or other cool, protected space. (I need one for my Florida garden.)





Camping Out with PP&L

PP&L VIDEO

Bill: Pacific Plug & Liner's trial always has a theme, and they always take that theme to the next level, with props, signage, clear messaging and even staff uniforms that reflects the concept. This year, they channeled their inner park ranger with a national park theme that included a guidebook (trial book) that you followed to collect stamps when hiking to each display

to learn about new introductions. It was really fun, and we could tell the entire PP&L team was on board and playing their roles to perfection.

Chris: I told the designer of their trials, April Herring-Murray, that she does the best displays of all the Trials. She seemed gratified that we noticed all her effort. Now, plants! Namely, my favorite from this trial, a new ... well, is it a new genus? It's semponium—a cross between aoenium and sempervivum created by UK breeder Surreal Succulents. It creates thick, full, colorful succulents that combines the colors of aeonium with the compact, thick, full habits of sempervivum. Pretty! I need to mooch a few for my house.



Bill: I'm a fan of ornamental grasses and have plenty of them in my yard. I was excited to see a new carex called Moon Falls that looks to be a solid improvement on existing varieties. Its foliage is green on the edges and cream down the middle, the reverse of PP&L's Feather Falls. When shown in comparison to other carex with the same foliage pattern, the green was far darker and the habit was much more substantial.



Well, boss, want to wrap up this newsletter? We've got another full day tomorrow with Dümmen Orange, Sakata and Danziger, plus a few hours of driving in between. We'd better get this thing edited and sent!

Chris: Thanks for sticking with us for Day 2 of the 2024 California Spring Trials. Be sure to watch our videos because we can show you a whole lot more there than we can in this newsletter. We do our best, but, hey—we never know what's going to make you the most money! See you for Day 3, when we cross the halfway point!

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Thanks for reading! See you tomorrow!

Chris, Jen, Bill & Osvaldo



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