2024 California Spring Trials Day 5: Benary; Cohen; Hishtil; Jaldety; PRUDAC



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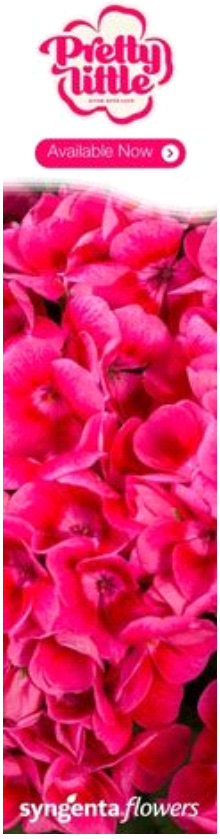

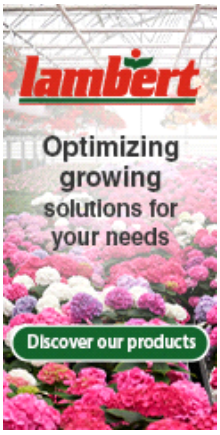



Acres of buzz from California Trials

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A Strong Finish

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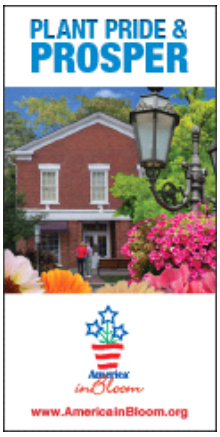
Chris: This is the newsletter we've been looking for, Young William—the last one! Five days of flowers and late-night writing takes its toll ... but as always, it's bittersweet when it ends. Traveling with you, Jen and Osvaldo to bring the new varieties to the folks is a lot of fun.

Bill: I've gotta say that this year was about as smooth as it can get in terms of travel logistics, video shoots, newsletter writing, weather and camaraderie amongst the Bobbleheads. We were in the groove, boss.







Chris: Even the Internet connections cooperated for a change. I believe we got to bed by 11:00 p.m. one night. Unheard of!

Bill: And the positivity we heard from readers, video viewers, social media followers and exhibiting companies kept us energized. I think I can speak for all of us and express gratitude for all the companies that support our coverage with ads, sharing social posts and welcoming us to Spring Trials sites with open arms.

Chris: You aren't going to get all weepy on me, are you, Bill? We've got flowers to write about! First stop, Griggs Nursery, home of three Israel breeders/producers (Cohen, Hishtil, Jaldety) and one from the Netherlands (PRUDAC).



Cohen's Unique Petunias

COHEN VIDEO

Bill: We learned an interesting tidbit about Cohen while walking through their new varieties: lettuce. One way they're keeping staff busy in the off-season and growing sales within Israel is by producing more than 3 million heads of hydroponic lettuce in three production facilities. That's quite a different crop from their core vegetative stock, don't you think, Chris?

Chris: Fancy clamshells of hydroponic lettuce is popular everywhere! But you won't find Petunia Designer Bridal Blush in a clamshell—you'll find it in big hanging baskets. Cohen has been producing petunias from famous UK breeder David Kerley for years, and Designer Bridal Blush is a nice one, with large, slightly ruffled flowers in shades of pink from pale to dark.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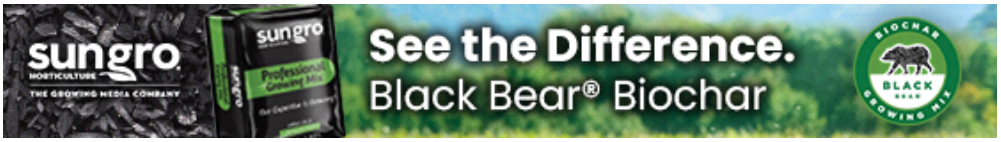
Bill: Cohen's second new petunia from David Kerley breeding for 2025 is Ovation Crimson Sky, a purply-red, ball-shaped variety with flower size and veining that looked just about perfect.

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Hishtil: Never Gonna Give You Up …

HISHTIL VIDEO

Chris: Fun fact about Israel: Did you know they have a government-run herb research station that develops new herbs to release to the industry? Royalties go back to the station for more research (at least that's how I think it works.) The No. 1 herb they've released is a rosemary called Barbecue, which you can find all over! Who knew?

Anyway, some of the herbs from Hishtil come from that program, such as Salvia Italian Sage, which is said to be powdery-mildew resistant.



Bill: Last year, we learned that Hishtil is actively breeding and selecting herbs for ornamental, as well as edible use and marketing these varieties in a collection named Double Marvel. A couple new intros for this collection are Thyme Compact PomPom and Salvia Snowflake with silvery foliage.

Chris: Lastly, a tender perennial: Scabiosa Kudo Blue, is said to be more compact than other *S. incisas*. Its big flowers last all summer and it joins Kudo Pink.

Bill: The folks at Hishtil were really excited to show us their new catalog and I was wondering where the piles of big, glossy literature were hiding. But, no … this year, they're moving to a tiny notebook-sized "catalog" with nothing but a QR codes for each variety leading customers to an app with full info. They encouraged us to open to page 37 and scan the code. Yep—we were "Rick Rolled."

Chris: I have no idea what you're talking about ... I assume our hip readers do, though.



What's Old May Be New at Jaldety

JALDETY VIDEO

Chris: Jaldety is mostly about succulents ... and not necessarily hot new hybrids, but the wonderful classic plants your grandmother or auntie might have grown. Such as *Crassula variegata:*



And *Delosperma lahmannii*, the first non-blooming delosperma we saw this week:



Bill: As you've seen in our videos, Jen loves soft, touchable plants and so do many consumers, so we were happy to see (and feel) Selaginella Green Spice Moss. It's a fun, little soft mossy plant that can be used indoors or outdoors.



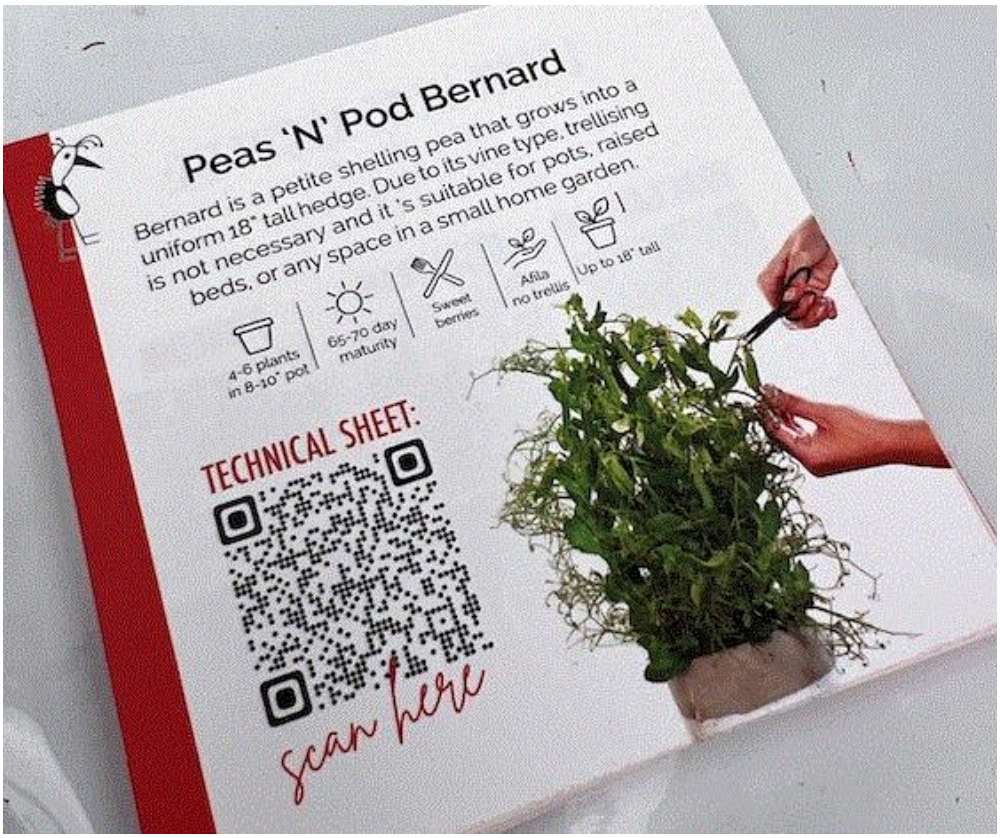
Going in the opposite direction was a vigorous, upright senecio, called King Solomon. This silver-blue succulent was tall and stately, making a nice companion to Senecio Blue and its more spreading habit.



PRUDAC: Produced for Consumption

PRUDAC VIDEO

Bill: We've gotten used to catching up with representatives from Dutch windowsill and patio vegetable plant breeder PRUDAC at Spring Trials and always expect to see small, unique veggie plants. The news from PRUDAC is that now there's a PRUDAC Americas, based out of Pure Line Seeds, a commercial pea and bean breeder based in Washington state, a pea and bean breeder. Sounds like an odd marriage ... and maybe it is because it's resulted in an unusual introduction: Peas 'N Pod Bernard, a dwarf windowsill shelling pea. That's right—not a sugar snap, a traditional shelling pea! Now, you're not going to feed a family with Peas 'N Pod Bernard, but you could educate America's youth about botany. Growing from seed to finish in about 60 days, kids (and adults) can see the whole seed to peapod process. And at the end, they have a handful of shelling peas to munch on or dry out and plant again.



Chris: The plant they had on display was a touch tired, so here's a photo of it in its prime. Oh, they did say they'll be working on a sugar snap potted pea, too.

Also new in kitchen window veggies is a sweet snack-type pepper called Luna Red with bite-size red fruit. And in the Ponchi collection of tabletop cherry tomatoes is Re Yellow (think the song "Do-Re-Mi" from "The Sound of Music") with bright yellow fruit—and loads of them; they said this little plant had 47 of them!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Benary: Focused on Seed

BENARY VIDEO

Chris: Our last stop of the 2024 California Spring Trials is Benary, in part because they serve a great lunch and various interesting flower-themed beverages (this year Masterpiece Martinis), but because we can also count on some good varieties with which to close out the season. And they always have a message. This year, three messages: 1) Grower-friendly solutions; 2) Benary is begonias; and 3) From seed.



Benary IS begonias.

Bill: Let's start with No. 2, begonias. Big begonias are my thing—you know this … and BIG Begonia is one of Benary's key crops, so it was awesome to see their new White Bronze Leaf. The foliage is about as dark as it can get and the white flowers are bright. The contrast is amazing and the new BIG matches up perfectly with the rest of the series. It's an important addition to the series.



Chris: Possibly the best-known begonia series from Benary is the Nonstops. These tuberous begonias have lots of wannabe competitors, but a look at their colorful display shows they still own the category. New in Nonstops is Lemon, Flame and Peach Shades (these three all have green foliage); and Nonstop Mocca (dark-leaf) Light Pink Shades. And in the Nonstop Joy series (mounding/semi-trailing) comes Mocca Rose (bottom).





Bill: Graffiti Pentas didn't get any new colors, but they got reorganized because they wound up with two series, OG (original) and 20/20. To simplify things, Benary picked the best of the best and combined them into one series, again called simply Graffiti. There are 15 colors in the revamped and simplified series—presumably, all your favorites.

Chris: I'm champing at the bit to focus on No. 3 above—"From seed." Because the breakthrough of the Benary trial, and one of the biggest breakthroughs of all the trials we saw this year, is the first-ever F1 hybrid lobelia, Masterpiece Blue With Eye. Obviously, a challenge to create, otherwise somebody would have done it already, Masterpiece is bred to compete with all those vegetative lobelias on the market that are touting durability and heat tolerance. Being from seed, Masterpiece has the benefit of easy storage, no disease risk and a lower price point. Sow three or four seeds per plug for a nice full plant. And, yes, other colors are coming, they say. Nice!



Bill: We saw a few new foliage and accent plants that I think will be popular retail items. There's an ornamental grass called Bunny that’s incredibly soft and grows a small fuzzy plume that looks like a bunny’s tail or rabbit’s foot. Also, two new eucalyptus—one silver (called StyX) and one green (Murray). Odd names for interesting and fragrant component plants.

Chris: Bill, you forgot the most important component plant: Dichondra Silver Surfer. Apparently, there have been supply challenges with this very popular combo pot spiller, and Benary hopes to fill the vacuum with good seed (85% germination) and plenty of it. Oh, this fits No. 1 above—grower-friendly solutions.



And before we head outside, a quick mention of BOOM! Petunia, a multiflora, seven-color series

that compliments their Success grandiflora series. Golly, how long has it been since we've talked grandifloras and multifloras, Bill?

Bill: Probably since Hem Genetics on Wednesday.

Outside of the greenhouses, between the scattered showers that decide to appear on our last day, I knew we'd find pansies and violas because Benary continues to breed in both classes. Last year, they introduced HighFlyer (their trailing series), which joined Inspire Plus, Inspire DeluXXe, Cats Plus and Admire Viola. New breeding means colors are added and improvements are made every year—sometimes just behind the scenes. We were also reminded that all Benary pansy and viola seeds are part of their Be Green program of environmentally responsible, eco-friendly seed treatments.



Chris: I have to brag on myself just a tiny bit, if I may. Benary always offers up some fun for attendees—one year it was virtual reality, another year it was helicopter rides, last time was a zip line. This year, with their golf theme (which served no specific purpose other than the fact that most golf courses have lovely flower beds ... and lots of growers love to golf) they had a four-hole putting contest. Low score wins a $500 gift card! Well, giving it my best shot ... I bogied the first hole (with a penalty stroke for going into the rough), parred the second hole, but then regrouped to sink tricky six-footers on the third and fourth to tie for low score at –1 with two other studs. Provided nobody shot –2 today, they'll have a drawing for first, second and third. Fingers crossed!





So Long … For Now

Chris: Done and done, Bill! Hopefully, our readers found something useful in our coverage ... and maybe had a little fun along with us. That's our goal.

Bill: It was cool to see so many of our readers and fans following along on social media, too. I tried to post quick videos and tons of photos on **FACEBOOK** and **INSTAGRAM** (@growertalksgreenprofit) every day—and every morning when I checked the numbers, we engaged with hundreds of industry members and the comments were fun to read.

Chris: Expect some post-event recaps in my *Acres Online* newsletter as I cogitate on what we saw and learned this week.

Bill: Thanks for reading! And remember: if you've got anything you want to ask us or tell us, do so by **EMAILING ME.**

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See you next year!

Chris, Jen, Bill & Osvaldo



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