CAST 2025 Day 4: Takii; HilverdaFlorist; Danziger; ThinkPlants; Syngenta



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FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 2025

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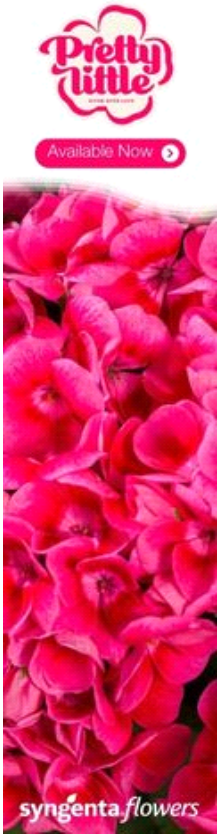

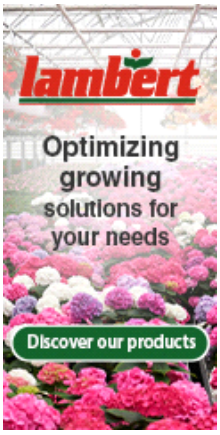





Acres of buzz from California Trials

IN THIS EDITION

American Takii
HilverdaFlorist
Danziger
ThinkPlants
Syngenta





Welcome to Day 4!

Watch the videos!

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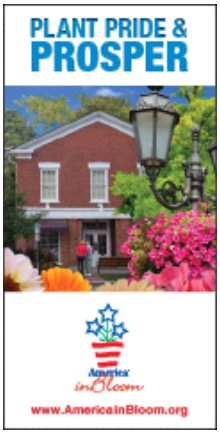
Chris: Well, Bill, we've made it to Day 4 (out of 5) of the California Spring Trials, meaning we're 80% done sharing the most interesting and potentially influencial new varieties with the folks. Looking back over the two dozen or so companies we've visited, I can't say I recall anything that will change the horticultural world for the better, but I have had my socks knocked off by some amazing flower colors and seen some great additions to existing series. And seen some really nice new series, a few of which should make a dent in their category ... much like most of the 31 years I've been coming out here.

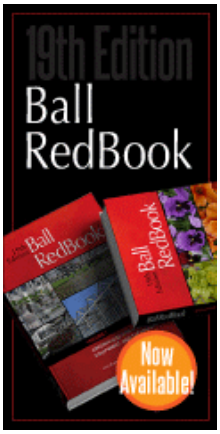
Bill: That's all true, Chris! Some of the themes I've picked up on are similar to the past couple of years with more crops positioned for shoulder-season sales (early spring and fall), bringing down the height of big-flowered varieties (either through breeding or fine-tuned PGR protocols) and simplifying combo recipes to grab attention at retail without being a production nightmare for growers. I've also noticed a bunch of soft pink introductions, especially in petunias.

Chris: Soft pink has become your new favorite color, hasn't it? I'll remember that at birthday time!









But about those trends you spotted—I think we've been seeing the same thing for a couple of decades, not just a couple of years. Extending the seasons, increasing compactness and uniformity, providing recipes and inspiration ... breeders have been showing that stuff to sales reps and retail buyers since the late '90s, I think ... about when the "pack" started going out of fashion.

Bill: I love the perspective you bring to the trials, boss. The fact you've been coming to California for more than three decades says so much. And JenZ and I are just about at two decades ourselves. Almost 70 years experience amongst the current Bobblehead trio has to help our coverage!

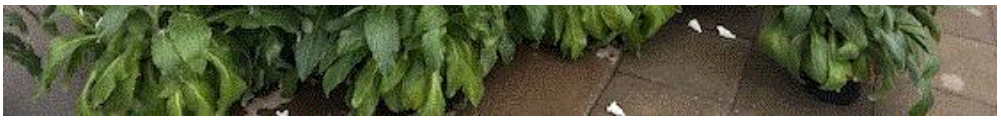
Chris: Sixty-six years at my count—two-thirds of a century! But the more we know, the more we realize we don't know! Which is why we annoy our trial hosts with so many pesky questions. Drives 'em nuts! Especially our favorite: "How many colors in the whole series now?" They never seem to know! Anyway, enough about us; let's dive into our first stop of Day 4, Takii.



Key additions and a new series at American Takii

Bill: The biggest display at Takii was a huge tower of flowers—the new digitalis series Hanabee—which our tour guide Yusuke Suzuki translated from Japanese as "fireworks." This new series of three colors is at least a week earlier than the existing Panther series and includes Rose, Pink and White. He explained they're first-year flowering, but should be grown as an annual. I think they'd make awesome patio cut flowers.





Chris: Also as part of our lesson in Japanese, Yusuke said that “hana” means flower and “bee” means ... well, bee. Which I guess makes Hanabee a good series name!

Meanwhile the Trilogy seed petunia series (named for its usefulness for growers, retailers and gardeners), which competes with E3 Easy Wave, gets a pair of new colors: Blue Vein and Rose Vein. You can see the vein pattern in the photo below.



Bill: New in Takii’s Belize Zinnia assortment are three doubles—Bright Rose, Pink Bicolor and Gen 2 Rose (an improvement). This brings the series doubles up to eight and four single-flowered types.



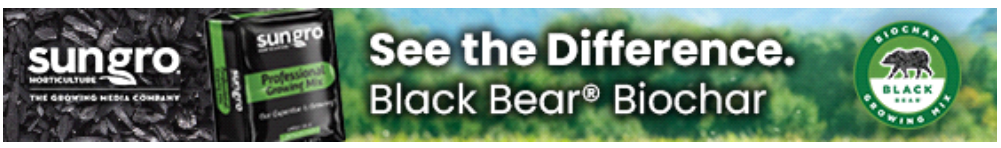
Chris: I asked Yusuke for the Japanese translation of the name of their new cut delphinium series Brezza and he said it means “soft wind” ... in Italian. Ah well, I’m now fluent in two new languages! Brezza improves upon the variety Jenny’s Pearl Blue by having much longer stems, and in the cut flower world, stem length equals money. Brezza offers Blue and Light Blue.





Our next breeding company visit was literally steps away from Takii: HilverdaFlorist, which rents space in one of Takii's greenhouses.

WATCH THE TAKII VIDEO HERE.



HilverdaFlorist's new gerbera, echinacea and dianthus for 2026

Bill: It's always fun to see what the folks at HilverdaFlorist have at CAST. They always grow out big, bright garvineas (their version of gerbera daisies), which makes the greenhouse super

cheerful. This year, they had plenty of garvineas—Sweets and Majestics. New for Majestic (double flower) is Yellow and the Sweet series (single flower) adds Sweet Chili.



There were five new colors in the Mooodz Echinacea series of first-year flowering varieties from tissue culture, all named for different moods—Serenity (white), Amaze (yellow), Flirty (hot pink), Fearless (orange) and Powerful (deeper, hotter orange). As a reminder, Mooodz are first-year flowering from TC and one of the first echinaceas to flower in the season.



Chris: Another trend we could have mentioned at the top: dianthus. Seems we've seen a dozen series so far this year and all of them shades of pink or red or white. Where's the yellow, blue and purple? A long ways off, I guess. But in the meantime. HilverdaFlorist is offering good-looking dianthus in their Beauties (garden) and Sunflor (carnation style) lines, both of which are hardy, compact and floriferous. Beauties gets four new colors and Sunflor gets three. Does that wrap us up at HilverdaFlorist, Bill?



Bill: Not quite, boss. I can't virtually head up the road to Danziger without sharing something I learned about Garvinea this morning. The Majestics actually have no pollen in the flowers, which means they not only last longer, but are less susceptible to thrips damage because the pests are seeking pollen. Thanks for indulging me. Now you can kick off our visit to Danziger, but not until we remind readers to **WATCH THE HILVERDAFLORIST VIDEO.**



A half-dozen highlights from Danziger

Bill: This trial is always one of my favorite trials because it's set up in a way that's easy to understand (a few big plants of each new intro) and the focus is 100% on the plants. I was excited to see what they had to offer for next year.

Two of my picks from this trial were new to the Petunia Capella series for quarts (meaning they're compact), but bred to gain size once they get to a consumer's garden or patio. Hello Sunshine is a bold yellow and Berry Lace has vivid purple centers with nice veining. Both are striking.



Chris: I like the Danziger trial because it's right behind Garlic World and sometimes we can convince some unsuspecting new editor to try the garlic ice cream. Which is good ... but, boy, does it have a lingering aftertaste! I think we've done several **VIDEOS** of the fun we've had doing that. But I digress ...

We've seen a bit of breeding activity in osteospermum this year and Danziger has a whole new series they call Besties, which they say is an upgrade of their older Ostica series (which it will probably replace). Besties improves upon the uniformity of timing and habit of the older series, making it easier to bench run the seven-color series. Bred in Israel, it's said to have good warm-weather performance, too.



Bill: Remember when diascia were wild-looking, bloomed quick and dropped spent blooms all over the place? Those days are long gone, thank goodness. Danziger's series is Trinity and blends disease resistance, heat and weather tolerance, and shatter-free flowers. They add two colors for 2026—Salmon and Pink—making four total.



Chris: Golly! Dahlias! Like dianthus, it seems everybody's got a series or three! Which is fine, of course—let the cream rise to the top. In Danziger's case, their Dahlia Darlin' series has big flowers on mid-sized plants that are suited for gallon programs. New colors are Scarlet, Pink Tint and Lemon Flair. I liked Pink Tint for the little tips of violet on the petals.



Bill: A couple more nice intros from Danziger that stood out for me included New Guinea Impatiens Colorfall Flamingo, selected for a unique hanging basket habit that results in foliage and flowers that sort of “bend” over the edge of the pot, catching attention when shoppers look UP at rows of baskets in garden centers. Usually all they’d see are stems and the undersides of leaves. Here's Danziger's Lisa Heredia showing it off.



I also liked Phlox Phloxstar Pink, a *Phlox drumundii* that actually roots well, which we learned is a common issue for folks growing phlox from cuttings. It joins three existing colors and is the best rooter of the group.

Chris: Best rooter ... that's one of those hidden traits that goes unappreciated ... until your cuttings only take at 75%. One last thing to mention is Danziger's combinations program called DuraBella. It's one of the longest running, with more than 100 recipes available. And to my eye, one of the best curated, with really pretty mixes. That might be because many have come from flag-style voting at CAST. This year's batch of a dozen or so new DuraBellas came from last year's trial attendee votes.

Enjoy our Danziger video **HERE.**



Thinking of plants is all we do

Chris: Sharing space with Danziger at Headstart Nursery in Gilroy is ThinkPlants, the marketing company helping 21 (at current count) horticultural companies market their plants. We took time to duck into the tent and visit a few of them. I spent a bit of time picking the brains of the folks at Kapiteyn, home of Captain Callas, a nice collection of Dutch-bred and propagated calla lilies. They tout the fact that, because the Dutch are so well-versed at storing flower bulbs of all types, they can offer callas for any holiday ... in fact, they were promoting the rich rose pink variety Captain Cheerio for next Valentine's Day (get your order in now).



Bill: Another ThinkPlants member with new intros, Royal Van Zanten, showed off some new members of the Alstroemeria Colorita series, both with variegated foliage. Lynne has cream-colored blooms with pink blush foliage and Lizzie is cherry red. As a reminder, Coloritas are dwarf alstroemeria that don't require PGRs or pinching.



Chris: An interesting factoid about CAST is that sometimes you can see the same variety at several locations. The key is knowing which version we should be writing about. In this instance, I'll write about Syngenta's new Digitalis, Dottie, a five-color perennial series that's said to be considerably (about 30%) more compact than the Camelot series. Super hardy, Dottie will go as far north as Zone 3.



Bill: Heuger joined ThinkPlants two years ago, bringing 75 years' experience in high-quality plant production to the table, focused on hellebores. New in the 2026 range is a collection called Ice 'n Roses, precision bred to have outward-facing flowers. Add in heat tolerance for growers in southern climates and you've got a win-win.



Chris: I'll close our brief ThinkPlant tour with hydrangeas, of which they showed dozens (including a brown-flowered one they were soliciting opinion and name ideas for; Jen and I combined to suggest Cherry Cola). But most interesting were the hydrangeas in hanging baskets from supplier Creekside Nursery, with lysimachia cascading and softening the pots. A pretty concept with retail potential, we think.



Watch our ThinkPlants **VIDEO HERE.**

Now, up the road about 15 minutes to Syngenta Flowers ...



Visiting the original Pack Trials site to see Syngenta

Bill: Chris, you may have attended trials 31 years ago, but I've also been around long enough to remember the iconic Goldsmith pack trials in Gilroy. That means I appreciate the event's history and the fact we still visit the original location in Gilroy to see Syngenta. Obviously, there's always a ton to see and we're sure to see at least one or two potential gamechangers.

Chris: You're almost correct, young William—the original 1967 (or maybe 1968) trial site was elsewhere in Gilroy, as I understand it. The current Syngenta location was built some years later, but still carries much history and many memories among CAST attendees.

Bill: Cool! Well, on to new varieties ... there was a heavy hitter just inside the greenhouse door and it was a sunflower. Yep, you guessed it—a new Sunfinity! The original Sunfinity was from seed (Yellow Dark Center) and last year we saw the first vegetative one, Sunfinity Double. New for 2026, Syngenta is going back to seed with Sunfinity Yellow Red Bicolor. The dark central disc is surrounded by a reddish halo graduating to yellow petal tips, making this a perfect crop to produce for fall sales. I think what growers will like most (besides the color) is that Syngenta worked diligently to nail down crop culture for the original seed-raised Sunfinity and the new one can be produced the exact same way.



Chris: Sometimes a name tells you a lot about a variety. Like Pinto versus Maverick Geraniums. We won't comment on which interspecific begonia variety iCandy has in its sights ... but anyway, the five-color collection offers large flowers, dark foliage and bright colors. Syngenta also touts a reliable supply of cuttings from their farm in Guatemala.



Bill: Man, those new begonias were nice. And our very next stop in the greenhouse was in front of two awesome petunias. We were really on a roll! New in the Sanguna series is a strong yellow

that will work very well in baskets and combos. On the other end of the spectrum was Black Widow—possibly the blackest black petunia we've seen. It's new for 2026 in the Fun House collection of weird and wild patterns.



Chris: A series that dates back to the Goldsmith days is Cora Vinca, today known as Cora XDR for its continually updated aerial Phythopthora resistance (now up to 36 strains!). Cora XDR gets a striking Red Glow, which we judge is the redest red in red vinca.



Nirvana XDR is the vegetative version of Cora XDR, offering unusual colors that can't be achieved by seed (at least not yet). Nirvana gets Apricot Splash, Watermelon and Coral.

Bill: How about an all-new double-flowered snapdragon series? Sweet Duet launches with five

colors: Peach, Citrus, Deep Red, Deep Orange and Appleblossom. Tech tip: Marketing manager and technical guru Alicain Carlson told us the varieties are not photoperiodic, but the timing is definitely impacted by temperature. Raise temps to 71F to cut a week and a half off production time versus 62.5F, as indicated by Syngenta's research trials.



Chris: I seem to be the history guy this year because here's another name going back to the Goldsmith days: Penny Viola. But forget what you know about that old series because new Penny Pro Viola, like Delta Pro Pansy, is ready for 2026. It's easy to grow and great for gardeners. Compared to Penny, it's at least a week earlier, with an overall tighter habit and better branching. The series starts with 13 colors, plus some mixes.



Bill: I'm going to run through a few more new-for-2026 intros we saw—and if I miss any, Chris, you can fill in the blanks. Until this year, there was only white in the Beehive spreading/trailing pentas series and now Pink Bicolor, Lipstick and Lilac are available.

Syngenta launched their first seed coleus series—Mezmerize—with four colors. Chocolate Lime has dark foliage with green edges; Chocolate Rose has dark leaves with red veins down the middle and green edges; Rusty Red is just as it sounds; and, lastly, a clean Lime Green. They're bred for late flowers and tidy habits.

Chris: I'm sure there were more ... like Viola Deltini Jump Up, spreading Pansy Freefall Pineapple Crush and, oh gosh, a dozen more! But we can't provide 100% of the trials or we'd be doing this until May!

Bill: And we kinda need to finish by 10:00 p.m. ... so I'll wrap up Syngenta with veggies in their Vegetalis collection of edibles for small-space gardens and patio pots. The 2026 program expands the tomato rage with three new determinant types—Divinity (small slicer), Akoya (cherry that matures black to orange) and Summer Dew (cocktail type for hanging baskets). Also new for Vegetalis is Baby Jack mini eggplant (fruit in 60 to 65 days) and a sweet green to red bell pepper named Big Ben.



Chris: Well, we've hit our word and picture limit for this newsletter, young William—or at least the limit of what our faithful readers can stand. But, as always, we can give you a whole lot more in our videos, so don't miss any of them ... including our **SYNGENTA VIDEO** ... into which we threw more than our usual share of shenanigans.

What's in store for Saturday?

Bill: Well, that's the end of Day 4 and I've got to say, not only do we still have plenty of energy, we're on top of our game—which is getting you accurate information on the newest varieties and having fun while doing so. But, hey, judge for yourselves by **WATCHING OUR VIDEOS**—organized into one handy playlist on YouTube. If you want to see more than a dozen flower pics from each stop, check out our **INSTAGRAM** @growertalksgreenprofit and **FACEBOOK** pages and we'd sure appreciate it if you'd like, comment and share.

Bossman, where are we headed tomorrow?

Chris: Our last day (sob) is a two-stop day, visiting the Israel breeding companies Cohen, Hishtil and Jaldety, then on to Benary for our last stop of the year. One year, Bill was killed under some giant Stonehedge stones. And last year, I tied for first in a putting contest! No telling what's in store for us ... you'll just have to read our coverage!











See you tomorrow!

Chris, Jen, Bill & Osvaldo



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