CAST Day 3: Santa Barbara Polo Club (8 Companies); Dümmen Orange



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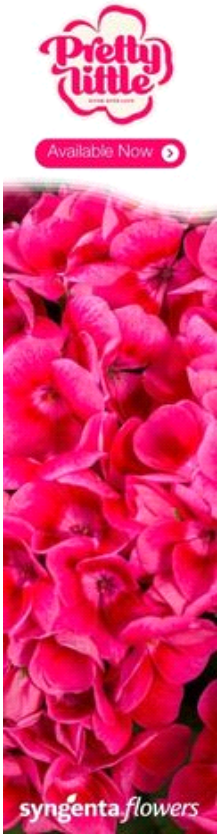
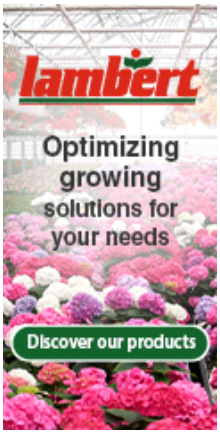








Acres of buzz from California Trials

IN THIS EDITION

Santa Barbara Polo Club:
- PlantHaven
- PP&L
- Suntory
- PDSI
- Nir
- Jaldety
- Hishtil
- Walters Gardens





CAST Day 3

Watch the videos:

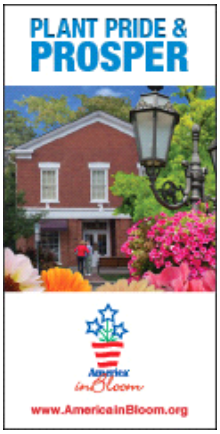
Santa Barbara Polo Club
- **PlantHaven**
- **Pacific Plug & Liner**
- **Nir**
- **Jaldety**
- **Hishtil**
- **Suntory**
- **Walters Gardens**
- **PDSI/Sunset/Southern Living/Encore**

Dümmen Orange

Bill: Welcome, readers, and buckle up! Because Day 3 is a big one, and we have a lot of companies and new varieties to cover.

Chris: Darn straight, young William! We knew this would be the hardest day of the trip. Just two trial locations, but No. 1, the Polo Club in Santa Barbara, has a mass of plant introduction companies. Thankfully, stop 2 was just a single company. But we had to drive almost two hours between them, and then another two hours to get to our hotel in Monterey, so this is a late night of writing, fueled by California wine and Vietnamese noodles. So as Bill says, hang on as we take you on a tour around the flower breeding world!









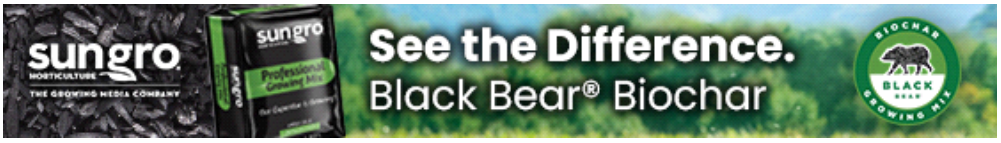
Bound for the Polo Club

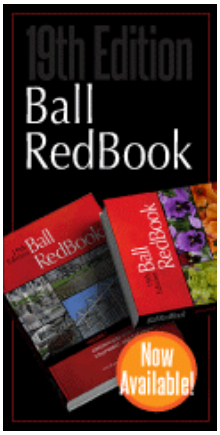
Bill: If folks watch our **VIDEOS**, they might hear us try to count the number of companies exhibiting at the Santa Barbara Polo Club and Jen guessed 741, I thought it was more like 1,200, but Chris used his mathing skills to determine there were actually …

Chris: Eleven! ... I think. But we're covering the plant introduction companies only, of which there are eight. The Polo Club has been gracious enough to host this collection of companies for a few years now and the number of tents keeps expanding, making this a stop worthy of about a half a day in order to take it all in ... and we didn't have half a day. So what did we do, Bill?

Bill: To cover such a huge stop efficiently and still have time for about four total hours of driving today, I had the brilliant idea to divide and conquer the Polo Grounds companies, with each of the three of us covering companies on our own before we reconvened with Osvaldo to shoot videos as a trio. Which means you get to read remarks from Jen this time!

Chris: Although each company exhibits in its own tent with their own theme, it seems like PlantHaven is sort of the ringleader of this Polo Club circus, so Bill, why don't you start with them since you got the scoop from Robert Bett.





From Gourmets to Grasses

Bill: PlantHaven brings unique plants to market—we know this—but they always seem to have intention behind each intro. For 2027, they're taking a first step into edible plants with a collection called Incredible Edibles. Gourmet Rosemary is the first release, and not only has excellent rosemary flavor, but is also very bright chartreuse instead of the usual green of most rosemary sprigs. Robert did share a sneak peek into a little "no photos allowed" greenhouse to see futures and experimentals, and showed a collection of raspberries called Ricochet bred by the legendary Scott Trees, so we know there will be more Incredible Edibles to report on in the future.



Also new from PlantHaven is a collection of Zone 4-hardy maiden grasses (miscanthus) covering a range of sizes from 2 ft. up to a towering 8 ft. Thankfully, they had a sign with details so I can report accurately. The smallest (2 ft.) is Little Miss and Robert explained it's the earliest miscanthus to color up red. Next is a 3-ft. variety called Gentle Breeze. For the 4-ft. spec, there's

Fire Dragon and if you want an 8-ft. tall maiden grass thats green with light-green bands that will flower early and through fall, there's Tiger Tail.



Continuing our tour through the wild world of PlantHaven, we came to a display of big colocasia with eye-catching colors and patterns. The company has been working with a University of Hawaii breeding program bringing plants to market for 18 years and the latest intro—new for 2027—is Mai Tai, with light green soft of camouflage foliage and awesome striped stems. You have to check out the **VIDEO** to see the stem color in HD. It's the first striped stem in the collection.

Finally, a retail program or package to wrap around the popular Super Semp Sempervivum program from PlantHaven. Using unrooted inputs out of Quality Cuttings in Mexico, you can produce little 2-in. pots of sempervivum in eight weeks and then wrap them in graphic sleeves for holidays, color schemes or even branded with company names. These are perfect little gift plants and I can totally see buying them for friends and family as Christmas ornaments to hang on the tree. You can probably hang them up and not water them for weeks with no issues.

Check out our video from **PLANTHAVEN.**

In the absence of time (and words), I'll stop there and let you jump in with one of your companies, Chris.



Tour de Fleurs

Chris: That would be Pacific Plug & Liner, where long-time trial maven April Herring-Murray designed a bicycle race, the "Tour de Fleurs" theme featuring five "stages" covering their main crop categories. But what they really wanted attendees to take away is that they're a perennial and specialty plant powerhouse, with more than 2,500 varieties in their list—"exclusive essentials and everything in between," as they put it.

First up, two new hellebores in their Frostkiss collection. Magico is an improvement over Glenda's Gloss, with a more compact habit and a later bloom time (so you can maybe sell it when there's not still snow on the ground). Flowers are white and deep magenta. And Vibey Velvet, which improves Anna's Red—it's shorter, later and has a better habit. Flowers are deep red with burgundy flecks.



If you like orange, you'll love Lewisia Sunset Glow, with rich orange flowers on a drought-tolerant compact plant.



And, finally, how about aloe? PP&L now offers a full collection of interesting aloes under the Azara name—a perfect addition to your succulents offering. The photo shows all the interesting colors and spine configurations you can get.



Check them all out, plus a few more, in our **VIDEO!**

Now, JenZ, show us one of your companies.



Perennials, Succulents, Herbs, Wax Flowers

Jen: Yea! Thanks for letting me crash your newsletter, gents!

For my part of covering the companies at the Polo Club, I got the three breeder/producers based in Israel. First was Nir Nursery. Their main specialty is cut wax flowers—those unique filler-type stems you see in bouquets. They did have a new variety of cut wax flowers, called Dual Star. The name has the word “dual” in it, but there are actually three different colors to the flowers—they start white, then change to pink and mature to purple. In Israel, they call it Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow. They said you can also grow it as a potted plant or even in the landscape if you wanted to.



Speaking of landscape, the other new wax flower variety they had is called Ever Flower because it continously blooms. Which isn't ideal as a cut flower type, but great in the landscape, so that's what they're promoting it as. All three colors in the series are very drought and heat tolerant—ideal for west and southwest regions. But you do have to prune it once a year or it'll grow a bit unruly.

I love Jaldety's stuff because they have the most touchable plants of the trials. If you don't believe me, try walking through their display without reaching your hand out—it can't be done! Anyway, the focus this year seemed to be on new salvia varieties. The first being a new series of of *S. guaranitica* called Tropicolour in three colors: Sunrise (orange), Carmine (red) and Claret (dark purple). The really cool thing about these is the very dark burgundy undersides of the leaves.

Last year, we saw *Salvia macrophylla* Melba Magic Peach—this year, they had two more bicolors to add to the series: Raspberry and Strawberry. Like Peach, the plants are medium height with dark stems.

And the third salvia (another *S. guaranitica*) is Sunkiss Cranberry Crush. It has very dark, almost

black, “caps,” and very bright magenta flowers. Sunkiss is more compact than Tropicolour and their other salvia series Amistad, but you still get the long stems and just as many blooms.



Cranberry Crush

Jaldety also has a line of thunbergia called Sunny Susy. There are two new ones: Orange Red and White Wedding, which is a pure white flower—no eye like typical thunbergia flowers.



I got to end with a touchable plant, this one a delosperma name Pickle Plant. Cream, daisy-like flowers appear as it matures, and it looks prickly, but it’s more tickly! (They call it Tickle Plant in Israel.)



Hishtil continues to add to their different herb programs: Growflow (trailing, cascading herbs), Double Marvel (herbs that are both edible and ornamental) and Durabello (herbs that can tolerate stressful conditions). Another thing they're working on is selling their herbs into different markets. For instance, some of the rosemary they produce is being sold to make preservatives, like in processed meats. And lippia, which pharmaceutical companies use for weight loss remedies, like in GLP-1s.

On the new variety front, they have a new Japanese Mint with an upright habit and very large leaves, and a Corsican Mint with teeny-tiny leaves that acts as more of a groundcover. They also had a rust-resistant oregano with fragrant, fuzzy leaves named Zoregano that's a cross between an *Origarium vulgare* and *Majorana syriaca*, an herb native to Africa.

And that's all I got to contribute to this newsletter! Besides my proofing support while I drink wine in the same room with you ... Oh, and watch the **VIDEO** because I was in charge and my closing was perfect.



XL to XS

Bill: You've read about perennials, annuals, herbs and succulents at the Polo Club, so let's get into a few tropicals and some core annuals from the venerable Japanese breeding company Suntory. I was expecting to see new introductions for the Sun Parasol line of mandevilla and dipladenia, and walking into the tent I spotted them immediately. First up is a true mandevilla called Giant Powder Pink with the characteristic large leaves, large blooms and big climbing habit. The blooms are deep pink and grabbed my attention from 10 ft. away.



Next are two more upright dipladenia types in the Sun Parasol assortment—XP Maui Sunset and Fired Up Magic Pink. I was told that Maui Sunset will most likely move from the XP collection into the upright FiredUp assortment next year after product managers saw more of the habit and characteristics in trials. Maui Sunset blooms are super tropical and orangey-red with coral undertones. Magic Pink blooms sort of transition from peach to a coral pink as temps warm up.

I promised hardcore annuals, and nothing says annual color more than petunias, and Suntory's Surfinia is one of the most iconic petunia series available. As with many series of petunias, subseries have been carved out over the years, and in Surfinia when you see "Heavenly" this indicates the most grower-friendly of the program (controlled growth, mounding habit, uniform) and new colors for 2027 are Heavenly Peach Horizon and Heavenly Blue Violet. Blue Violet is just as the name describes, but with dark veins, and Peach Horizon is a first in this color range from Surfinia and actually looks like it'll be a cool color for fall combos paired with dark-foliage plants. It also holds the peach color in the heat of summer.



Speaking of subseries of existing series … Suntory launched a very compact three-color collection of bidens called Beedance Petites, and you guessed it, they're no-PGR versions of the Beedance series in Orange, Red and Yellow.



Aside from some improvements in Grandaisy Argyranthemum, Surdiva Scaevola and Granvia Bracteantha, I think that's a wrap from Suntory. You can see all of these varieties and more in our **VIDEO**.



Where to next, Boss?

Chris: Walters Gardens, of course, for more perennials! Walters is a first-time exhibitor as a solo act—we've seen them as part of Proven Winners out here, of course. And they had a big display of great perennials! But I asked them for three of their top intros and here's what they said:

Hyssop Nectar Ninja might be the perfect perennial: it's easy to grow, has tons of flowers, is drought-tolerant, offers all-season color and pollinators love it. What else do you need?



Heliopsis Forged in Fire has double flowers, dark stems, tons of branches (and, hence, tons of flowers), and best of all is mildew-resistant. Great for summer and fall color.



And Salvia Living Large Dark Sky is a novel hybrid, a cross between *S. nemorosa* and *S. fancysauce* (as the Walters folks joked). In other words, they ain't talking. The plants were a bit rangy in the trial, but in the tag photos the plants and blue flowers look spectacular.
And it's tough—Zones 3 to 8.



We shot a video of all three **HERE**.

Oh, and if you want to see 30—yes, 30—new perennials from Walters, check out the **LIVESTREAM** I did with them a few weeks ago.



Combos, Annuals, Perennials

Chris: Alrighty! I said we drove a lot, and when I say we, I meant me—I do all the driving, while Jen mans the stereo and Bill and Osvaldo work in the back seat, keeping us caught up with our trial coverage. It's just under two hours north from Santa Barbara to Arroyo Grande and Center of Effort Winery, home to Dümmen Orange, where they had more than 50 new varieties on diplay (plus loads of existing ones). But they know we can't write about it all, so they helped us focus on the key introductions. It's a lot smaller than the Polo Grounds, so no need to divide and conquer here—we all stuck together. Bill, what did you like?

Bill: One thing we can be assured to see at Dümmen is beautiful combination mixes and they were displayed front and center in their big display tent. The first ones that caught our eye were a handful of shade combos called Shade Princess. They're new to the Garden Party program and include big Magnum New Guinea Impatiens and Dummen's huge Nanouk Tradescantia. The combos were named Grace, Charlotte, Kelsey and Madeline. Striking for the shade!



Also new in Dümmen combos are eight additions to their annual/perennial mix program named BlooMix, with each including two perennials and one annual. The combos include the classic thriller (like a leucanthemum), filler (maybe a salvia) and a calibrachoa spiller. One of the

most popular mixes has lavender as a filler, meaning the combo has fragrance. How cool is that?



Chris: I'm all about giving folks more reasons to buy plants! And a good one to buy would be the newest I'Conia Begonia from Dummen, Valencia Pink. It's unique enough in habit to be a stand-alone—bigger than their compact Bacio collection and more upright than their trailing Miss collection. As for the color? Well, Marta Maria Garcia calls it Sunset, which works when you note the yellow-and-orange center that goes along with the scarlet-pink outer petals.



And as the hot-climate gardener of the bunch, I'll also make note of three new Lantana Havana introductions: Cherry Red, Sunset and Sunrise. Cherry Red is especially striking.



Bill: Remember last year what we saw the minute we walked up to the Dümmen display—if not, jump back in time and watch the beginning of our **2025 VIDEO**.

Chris: That was pretty funny! I believe you exclaimed, “Shut the front door!”

Bill: Yep, that was the first time we laid eyes on Summer Bees Dahlias. Two new ones join the series of huge, daisy-flowered dahlias, Salmon Bicolor (which was our favorite) and Red Star (a semi-double flower form, two-toned red and yellow).



Before we leave the annuals displays, let me shout out a new petunia in the Sweetunia series for baskets and bigger pots that I though had a cool name … Violet Vortex. It's purple and white with what looks like an unstable color pattern, which I think is cool in a tie-dye sort of way. Windmill Burgundy and Windmill Rose were also new Sweetunias.



Why don't we move on to perennials, Boss? Maybe start with another fun name I know you liked.

Chris: We are suckers for a fun name, something we'll remember long after we've returned home from this adventure, and Agastache Honeysticks Gold fits the bill. It's aptly named, for its rich golden-yellow upright flowers. It's not the first yellow agastache, we're told, but I doubt you'll find one with a better habit—it almost looks like an annual, it's so tidy and mounding. But it's a Zone-4 perennial.



Bill: Sticking with perennials, I was happy to see three new first-year-flowering coreopsis in the Radiant series—Orange, Red and Lemon. Why was I happy, you might ask?
Because they’re Zone-5 hardy and also heat tolerant, meaning they'll bloom throughout the summer in my Cleveland garden. Gee, I hope they’re in the Dümmen sample pack this year. Hint, hint ...

And another newer series that gets 2027 additions is Sedum CloudBurst, which now includes Cloudburst Copper and Cloudburst Lime, and join Burgundy and Green Flash, bringing the series to four colors. These pretty little sedums are Zone-4 hardy.



Chris: I'll wrap up our perennials discussion with something that will make northern gardeners happy ... and when I say "northern," I mean just about above the Arctic Circle: Dummen is continuing their trialing of perennials for extreme cold hardiness, with those that pass being added to their True North Perennials collection—meaning Zone 3. I believe they had three big planters out front filled with them.



Better Breeding Benefits All

Bill: Some of the key messages at the Dümmen stop this year revolved around science, which makes sense from a global breeding company focused on innovation. They told us that nine of their Potunia Plus varieties are “powered by Intrinsa” which you might remember is their TMV resistance breeding. Intrinsa technology also results in white rust-resistant garden mums. But Intrinsa breeding for resistance is just one of the three pillars of science we learned about.

The other three were “predictive breeding,” which uses big data and cutting-edge DNA technology to move forward breeding to combat complex diseases (like Botrytis and powdery mildew); “production innovation,” leveraging cell biology technology to solve production challenges and improve products’ paths to market; and “Greencare”—a rigorous five-step sanitation strategy to help keep crops clean and disease free throughout the supply chain.

Chris, did I miss anything there? I know we showed all of the varieties above and more in our **VIDEO**.

Chris: If there was more, we wouldn’t have room for it—we don’t want these newsletters to turn into novels, for Pete’s sake!



Day 3 was a whirlwind … Tomorrow should be equally exciting!

Bill: I knew today was going to send us in all sorts of directions, with just about every product category our industry has to offer represented by an exhibiting company. I’ll admit, I’m pretty exhausted mentally. Trying to think back and come up with an answer to the “So what did you see that sticks out in your mind” question is near impossible. But that’s sort of the beauty of our industry—something for everyone and innovation across all categories and types of plants.

Chris: Good point. This is the point in the trip when we get asked that question, and as intrepid journalists, we want to have good answers. So get thinking on it!

Bill: Will do! But in the meantime, what’s the plan tomorrow? Hopefully, not a dozen companies again. I’m not sure my brain could handle that!

Chris: It’s all downhill from here—just two stops tomorrow: Sakata and Takii, both Japanese breeders with excellent genetics, but we won’t be overwhelmed by thousands of plants. I think you can handle it.

Bill: Speaking of numbers, I was doing some quick math and so far—between our newsletters, full **YOUTUBE** videos, **FACEBOOK** slideshows and **INSTAGRAM** photos and Reels—we’ve gotten more than 40,000 views in just two days of trials (not including today), and for that, I’m truly grateful. The fact you all engage with our industry-leading coverage and is the reason we do it and will keep doing it! In fact, we’ll be back in your inbox in 24 hours with Day 4 e-news coverage and videos from each exhibiting company.

Chris: Thanks for sticking with us, everybody. See you tomorrow!



See you next time!

Chris, Jen, Bill & Osvaldo



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