

CAST 2026 Day 4: American Takii; HilverdaFlorist; Sakata; Kientzler

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Chris: Well, Bill, Day 4 of five is in the books—the trial notebooks, that is—and while it was what we consider an easy day, with just two stops and four breeding companies, and even time to

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linger over our Hawaiian BBQ lunch, we still saw some worthwhile introductions, some intriguing experimentals and some genera we have no experience with but would love to try!

Bill: I think the companies we visited today were toward the top of my list of “classic” trials. Sakata and Takii are exhibiting in their own greenhouses and showing core crops with modern breeding. Add in HilverdaFlorist with a very unique product range and Kientzler, which both breeds and partners with leading breeders to bring innovations to market, and it’s a well-rounded day that felt pretty natural to cover.

Let’s get into it, Bossman.



Our Morning Glow Up

Chris: Alrighty, let’s dive in, taking a couple of our favorites from each stop. And, well, Takii had a bit of a soft year for new introductions, so I’ll run with the big one that took center stage in their greenhouse: Rudbeckia Claire Orange. Claire is the first male-sterile seed rudbeckia on the market. Sterile means the flowers last a long time; plus, no pollen on the orange flowers with dark centers. Garden performance-wise, it’s an AAS winner, meaning it performs well just about everywhere, with an abundance of flowers all season long. Growers don’t have to pinch it or apply PGRs. Oh, pro tip: For the best uniformity, grow it under 14-hour days.





Bill: A good tip for sure! The display for Claire was dramatic and just across the greenhouse was another big vignette with a huge range of combination planters, something we hadn't seen at Takii very much in the past—certainly not at this scale. All of the combos were sorted into five collections all under **THE GLOW COLLECTION** banner (which is trademarked).



Three of the collections—Golden Glow, Rosy Glow and Moon Glow—fit a “premium” category for larger 14-in. and bigger combos featuring a thriller plant and two fillers. The other two collections—Soft Glow and Bold Glow—fit more of a value price point. (Click the link above to learn more.) Utilizing some of Takii’s best and most established products, these combos were very intentionally created (based on performance, grower success and color) and should appeal to just about any shopper.



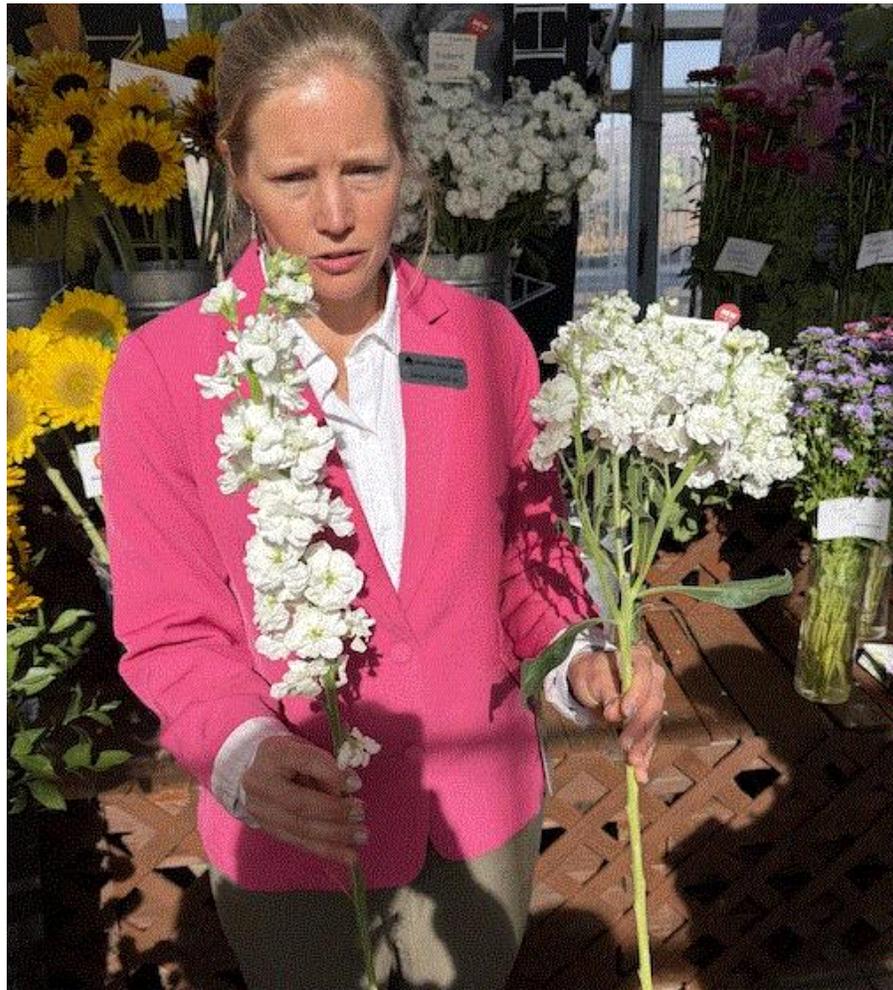
Experimentals & Cuts from Takii

Chris: Takii had an experimental corner showing that next year could be a blockbuster, with new calendula, Trilogy Petunia colors and zinnia. And most exciting, a pair of robust-but-compact sunflowers, including one that’s said to be mildew resistant.



Bill: Last but not least is cut flowers, which Takii is well known for—and which we like to cover on behalf of Lindsay Daschner, editor of our cut flower newsletter *Bloom Beat*. She should like this one: it's a stock (matthiola) called Trident White.

Why Trident? Picture Poseidon's pitchfork and its three prongs and you'll picture how Trident's flowers branch rather than making one long bloom spike like a regular stock. In other words, a spray-type stock.



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Okay, Boss, next up is ... ?



Blooms for Patios, Pots & Landscapes

Chris: HilverdaFlorist! Just a grueling 30-ft. walk from one greenhouse to the next. This Dutch company specializes in gerbera and proved it by introducing both a new series and some good colors. Melodiva is the new seed series, bred for smaller pots (4 to 4.5 in.) and excellent uniformity in crop timing (90% in bloom at the same time) and uniformity in flower stem length. Naturally compact, it requires no PGRs (because these chemicals are being phased out

in Europe).

Interestingly, HilverdaFlorist chose to introduce Melodiva here in North America first, rather than at the Flower Trials in Europe in June. Makes us feel special! But that's because we're a strong market for them.



A couple of other new gerberas (from tissue culture, not seed) are Masai Mara in the Patio Gerbera collection, which are big plants with big flowers. And Garvinea Sweet Pastry, a garden type with pretty light pink flowers with dark eyes (pinks usually have green eyes). I don't recall ever seeing a plant named for baked goods before, can you, Bill?



Bill: Hmm. There must be because I feel like we walk trials every year and find variety names that make us hungry. In fact, I vividly remember you and I covering the IPM Essen show more than a decade ago and getting hungry walking into the Danish exhibit hall ... but I digress.

Chris: Now THAT is funny!

Bill: All this talk about pastries puts me in a good mood. Speaking of that, HilverdaFlorist has a TC series of echinacea called Moodz (yes, three Os) named for emotions and feelings and new for 2027 is the first white in the series named Zen. It does replace a previous white coneflower called Glory. We were told this series is one of the fastest from TC plantlet to finished plant of any TC echinacea on the market.



Beyond Gerbera & Echinacea

Chris: I'll admit I don't know too much about dianthus—there are so many types and styles and flower forms. And I've never grown them. But I do get that HilverdaFlorist's Sunflor collection is Zone-6 hardy, meaning you can grow them outside, but they're also good for gift and patio use. Sunflor gets two new colors: Jackie is a rich red and Beetle is purple ... and an odd name. I did once have a cat named Beetle Bomb—Beetle for short ... but now I digress!

Dianthus Beauties is Zone 3, offering true hardy perennial garden performance. It gets a new white called Romee, with clear white single flowers.



And, lastly, Picture Perfect is a stand-alone in red and pink, which makes it perfect for Valentine's Day and Mother's Day—it's targeted sales window. A key with this one is that, as the flowers age, they hold their vivid color, giving the plant up to two weeks more shelf life than lesser varieties.



Check out an overview video from HilverdaFlorist [HERE](#).



Atakas ... (Watch the video!)

VIDEO LINK

Chris: The nice thing about today's stops, Takii and Sakata, is that they've changed little in the 34 years I've been coming out here. However, I remember when Sakata was almost nothing but pansies and violas—many dozens of bowls in 11 different series, if memory serves! But today, the highlight at Sakata tends to revolve around SunPatiens and SuperCal Petunias. Bill, tell the folks more.

Bill: Last year, Sakata celebrated 20 years of SunPatiens, which are most certainly an industry standard by now and one of the most recognized garden plants on the market. There has been a Compact subseries for years and most of our readers will have grown this assortment, but some growers south of the Mason-Dixon line even find Compact a bit too vigorous for smaller baskets and pots.

We've heard an even smaller version of SunPatiens is on the way for at least a year and I was happy to see it introduced at CAST 2026. SunPatiens Petite is 20% smaller than compact and positioned for 8- to 12-in. pots and NOT (I repeat NOT) for in-ground use.



Yes, Petites have all the great characteristics as other SunPatens and can be grown just about the same way, but they are quite small and might not perform the way gardeners have come to expect SunPatens to perform, growing big and filling tons of space.

The new series launches with five colors—Scarlet Red, Orange, Rose, Purple and Blush Pink.



A Sweet Treat



Try All 5 Colors

More from Sakata's Core

Chris: Along with introducing Petite, Sakata has also been upgrading some

existing SunPatiens colors. They don't tend to call them improvements; instead, they develop fully improved genetics and drop the old one. Such as Compact Bright Purple replacing Compact Purple and Compact Scarlet Orange replacing Compact Orange. Both have been upgraded for large, vibrant flowers, enhanced wilt resistance, better branching (and hence more flowers) and darker green foliage.



Another improvement worth mentioning is in their multi-award-winning Profusion Zinnia series, where Fire Improved will be replacing Fire, bringing bigger, better flowers.



Bill: SunPatiens, Profusions ... Sakata really has some venerable series and we haven't even talked pansies yet. I'll leave that for you, Chris, and I will cover a few new SuperCals.

Sakata has been breeding and developing petchoa (petunia and calibrachoa crosses) for 15 or 20 years and until recently were the only ones in the petchoa game with SuperCal. In fact, they have standard SuperCal and a more compact series called SuperCal Premium and between the two series, there are more than 25 colors! With two more premiums added for 2027—Purple Ice and Pink Star. Purple Ice is a silver/white with purple throat. Pink Star, however, is a really unique color that looked almost watercolor painted with a bunch of soft pink tones. We all really liked that one.



Chris: I LOVE that color. Like a watercolor of strawberry jam with a hint of fuchsia at the tips, a bit of yellow and orange in the throats ... well, here, I'll post a closeup photo:



Bill: Oh, there was another new one—actually an improvement. We don't always mention improvements, but new Sunset Orange Improved was a pretty huge upgrade to the old soft orange color. It was super vivid!



And We're Not Done Yet!

Chris: I mentioned pansies and violas at the opening, so I should probably tell our readers about the new ones from Sakata—proof that they're still breeding in that category! Colormax Violas get Yellow With Blotch; the medium-flowered Grandios get Spring Grandio Deep Purple and Yellow With Blotch; and Grandio Blue With White Shades. And the venerable Majestic Giants II series gets a Clear Scarlet. All good additions, but what I'd love to see is a whole new series that would shake up the pansy market. Wonder if there's anything in the back room ...?



Bill: Our old friend Kris Carlsson toured us through the Sakata trial. He's been pretty excited about their Playlist combination program since it launched and I could tell he was psyched to show us the new-for-2027 mixes. I think he said they're up to more than 40 mixes, including 11 added this year. With Sakata's range of genetics, there are plenty of ingredients to work with, but the trick (as always) is keeping the combos grower-friendly, and able to be ordered and produced with minimal hassle.



Now that Sakata and Kientzler (who we'll write about next) have partnered in a Guatemalan farm, now the vegetative assortments from Sakata and Kientzler can be ordered from Innovaplant in Guatemala or Costa Rica, opening up the Playlist mix components to a huge new palette from Kientzler—especially “thrillers” like cyperus and eupatorium.

Chris: I'll say one thing about the Playlist recipes: If you put Sakata's display in the back of a garden center, there'd be a mad stampede of gardeners wanting to grab their favorite. Even the subtle colors pop!

Watch the full Sakata trial video [HERE](#).

But now for another long commute ... 50 steps around the corner into the section of the greenhouse that German breeder Kientzler calls home for the week.



Innovative Breeding & Strategic Partnerships

Bill: Kientzler has exhibited in the Sakata location for a few years now, and I always look forward to seeing what they have because it tends to be a cool mix of tried and true (like petunias, standard coleus, bidens ...) and weird and wild (gomphrena, oddball coleus and things we don't even recognize). This year did not disappoint!

Chris: We certainly expand our Latin vocabulary at Kientzler, eh? Like the new Jammin' series of Jamesbrittenia, a South African native with 84 different identified species! We're not sure which one Jammin' is, but picture a bacopa with brightly colored flowers and you'd have the idea.

Now, traditionally, Jamesbrittenia have had delicate root systems, making them picky to grow. Kientzler has been breeding for grower-friendliness. Just keep them on the dry side and you should be fine. Jammin' starts with five colors.



Bill: I remember seeing the Kuyamba Petunia collection last year because the name was cool and the plants were massive. This is Kientzler's series of huge, patio pot-type petunias with bold colors and big blooms. New for 2027 is Salmon Glow, with rosy-pink, salmon-y shades that I really liked.

A standalone petunia caught my eye and I correctly identified it as a landscape type. Of course, I saw the tag—SummerScape Pink. I did not, however, know it is from David Kerley's breeding program, which has produced phenomenal petunias (and other crops) for decades. It's sure to be a great garden performer.



Chris: You're on a roll, Young William. I won't get in your way!

Bill: Probably the most exciting (to me) petunia intros from Kientzler this year are the four members of a new series named Showtime. These are small-flowered petunias (like calibrachoa-bloom small!) that look cute and tidy, but perform like petunias in pretty much any application—from small 4-in. pots to baskets to patio pots and even in the landscape. They're petunias after all. The four colors are Lilac Punch, White, Orchid Flash and Pink Punch.

Chris: I don't know about you, Bill, but this next one fooled me; I thought for sure it was a two-variety combo, with upright flowers as a thriller and pretty little foliage as a spiller. But, nope, it's an ajuga called Feathered Friends! Bred by well-known plantsman Chris Hansen of Chick Charms fame, Feathered Friends puts LOADS of pink or blue upright flowers on this traditional groundcover. Foliage is either chartreuse or slightly bronzed. One culture tip for this Zone-4 perennial: It needs vernalization, meaning 41F for six to eight weeks. But golly, it's like a whole new species—a mixed combo in one plant!



Bill: Here's an underrated plant that we haven't seen at Spring Trials in a long time, at least I can't remember any ... torenia. A blue flower for the shade is always cool in my book. But torenia is usually a small pack-type seed-raised bedding plant if you even find it at retail. Perhaps that can change if growers start picking up new genetics and vegetative types like Kientzler's Tropics series. It launches with four colors—Silver, Amethyst, Rose and Lilac—and the plants are pretty substantial in terms of branching, and they don't even require a pinch. From what we heard, even though torenia is a shade plant, the Tropics can be produced in higher light situations.



We've seen some crazy coleus at Kientzler over the years, mostly coming from the University of Florida breeding. Unique shapes, wild colors and even some that look like they're trailing down.

So I was wondering what we'd see this year. I'll tell you about four.

First up is Crimson Magic, with yellow-toned foliage that won't burn up in sun like most yellow coleus that need shade. As a bonus, this one has dark red stems that add a cool dimension.



Next, maybe my favorite plant name of the trials so far—Cosmic Confetti. It's a speckled green and cream with big leaves and significant size. It's in Kientzler's TerraScape Upright series.

Also in the TerraScape collection, but the Mounding subseries, are two more coleus. All That Lime Twist is chartreuse green and looks like a nice patio pot habit, while All That Cinnamon Pop is more of a red-toned variety with the same nice mounding habit.



If you want to see three Bobbleheads walk through the trial telling you all about the plants, [HERE'S THE VIDEO LINK.](#)



Four Days Down, One To Go!

Chris: I'm gonna put a bow on Day 4! Folks, we greatly appreciate you sticking with us for this adventure. It's not easy to decide what to cover. As I've been saying for years, at best, we bring you 10% of what we see ... maybe 5%. But we also know you can't get away from your busy businesses to be here ... so we take the task of curating our coverage very seriously. But also remember: If it's not here, chances are good you'll see it in our video, or perhaps in photos that Bill is posting to our Facebook and Instagram pages, eh, Bill?

Bill: The social media engagement just keeps snowballing! If you're not following us on Instagram and Facebook, you're missing out on bloom shots, overview slideshows of the trials, POV videos through my Meta Glasses and candid photos of our team in action captured by Osvaldo while we meet with representatives at every stop.

If **FACEBOOK** is your thing, click the link. If you prefer Instagram, [HERE YOU GO](#). You can also find all sorts of social media coverage and posts searching #CAST2026 or #CASpringTrials on most platforms.

Chris: Just one last day, where we'll be covering two stops: Danziger and Syngenta. Both fairly large, both offering key series and both with the potential to surprise us with a ground-breaking introduction, so stay tuned! It ain't over 'til it's over!



See you next time!

Chris, Jen, Bill & Osvaldo

Chi Jen Bill 

Chris Beytes
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Jen Zurko
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