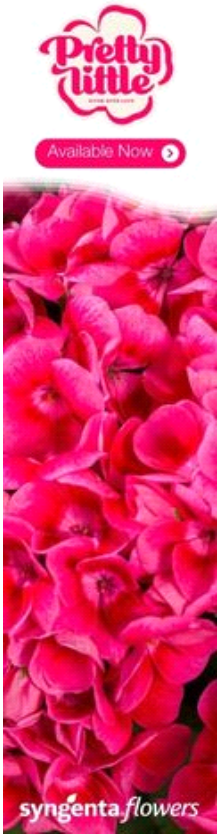
CAST 2026 Day 5: Danziger; ThinkPlants; Syngenta

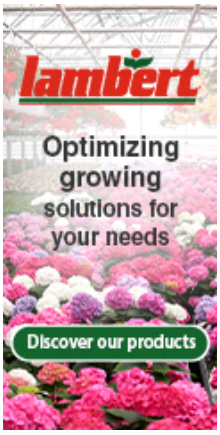


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FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2026

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Danziger
ThinkPlants
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Day 5 of 5: Finishing strong!

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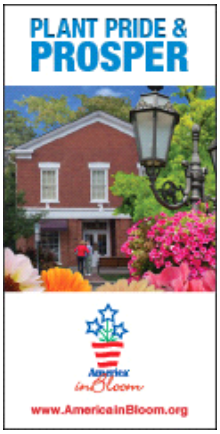
Bill: Hey Chris, you'd think that after all these 14-hour days covering Spring Trials we'd be exhausted and stumbling around like zombies, but I woke up bright-eyed, bushy-tailed and ready to cover the last few trials. Of course, we did get the newsletter and videos done before 10 p.m. last night, which is early for us.

Chris: You said it! Nothing worse than a bad internet connection and slow upload speeds when you're 30 minutes from Silicon Valley. Thankfully, the Hampton Inn treated us right. And it's a good thing, too, because our final two stops are key stops, and we probably saw close to 100 new varieties!

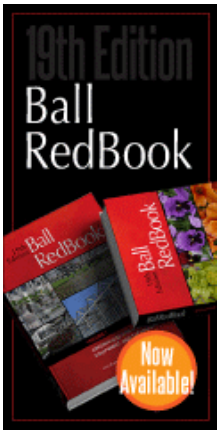
Bill: Thankfully, both host sites—Danziger and Syngenta—are Spring Trials pros and set things up in ways that make it easy to cover all the new intros. And we took notes on just about all of them.

Chris: Now if we could just read our own notes ... But enough rannygazoo, Bill! Since our readers are probably opening this newsletter over the weekend, let's try to keep it as concise as possible. Do you think we can stick to, say, four new varieties each from each trial?









Bill: With 100 intros? Impossible. How about four classes each … Let's give it a try. Starting with Danziger at Headstart Nursery in Gilroy, right behind Garlic World.



Big Blooms & Bold Colors

Chris: As Bill said, Danziger has never changed their layout: two long, three-tier benches with just new varieties on it, three pots each. Easy to see, easy to talk about, easy to photograph. Well, except for what you're about to talk about, Bill ... it had its own display.

Bill: The largest display of the entire trial was an entire back wall graphic for Amazonas petunias. These are Danziger's weird and wild colors on plants that behave well in production. The series launched a couple years ago with Plum Cockatoo, with crazy purple-ish flowers with green edges and now expands by three more. Pink Macaw (sort of an upgrade to Plum Cockatoo), Midnight Finch (much more purple with the green edges) and Violet Parakeet (more white than the others).



You said four classes each, right? Good. Because I do want to shout out a couple more petunias in the Capella series—Rose Ink and Inked. Inked is a silvery-white petunia with dark purple cobweb-looking veins. It looks like a fine-line tattoo and is one of my favorite plants of the entire

trip. Oh yeah, Capellas are Danziger's series for quarts that don't need PGRs.

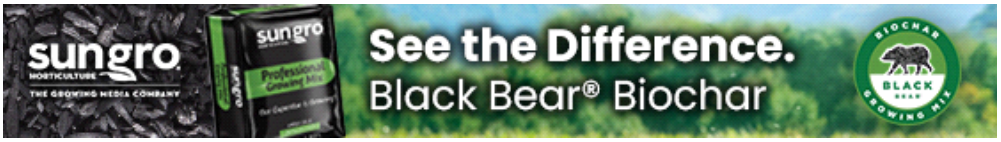


Chris: Lots of new calibrachoas at Danziger ... gosh, remember when we first saw "Million Bells" at Pack Trials back in 1997 or whenever it was?

Bill: Um ... I was still in college then.

Chris: Then you were unaware what a revelation, what an innovation, calibrachoa was! I think it took us three years to figure out how to pronounce it! Now they're ubiquitous. But still, good ones continue to pop up, like Danziger's new Lia Mega Yellow, with rich yellow blooms and large flowers (for a calibrachoa). Eyeconic (their collection with eyes) gets Amber, a yellow with a burgundy eye; and Ombre, their collection of interesting multi-colored blooms, gets Tyler Glam with flowers that go from yellow to rose to pink, like a sunset.





Danziger Continued ...

Bill: I'm going to cheat again and mention two new for 2027s that always seem to go together in my mind—nemesia and diascia. In nemesia, Danziger has the Nesia series and there are three new varieties named Arctic Blue, Hot Red and Gold. Watch the **VIDEO** to see how cool Arctic Blue is with at least three different colors in each bloom.



And in the diascia Trinity series, two new colors—White and Blush. These interspecifics have exceptional heat tolerance and shelf life.

Chris: Believe it or not, I'm going to talk about a scaevola. Why? Because Bali Blue might be the prettiest scaevola I've seen. The flowers are a perfect blue, the habit is absolutely uniform, the green is clean and just the right shade to compliment the flowers—not too light, not too dark ... it would be a shame to relegate this to combo basket status. We're told it's long-lasting, and all the flowers open at once. Oh, and that more colors are coming!



Bill: Boss, remember last year during the Danziger video you, me and Jen did a goofy little skit by the osteo Besties bench playing off the personality naming?

Chris: Vaguely … didn't you call me "Dynamic Chris"?

Bill: I did ... and I'll stand by it. This year, there are three new colors and they're all named for me! Brilliant (Bronze), Playful (Bicolor Purple) and Vivid (Violet). These osteos are positioned for quarts up to gallons and don't require cooling to flower.



Chris: In which case, we can expect the Calkins subseries, featuring Goofy, Obsessive and Methodical.

Bill: Can't argue with that! But Methodical wouldn't be a very good variety name ...

Chris: My last picks at Danziger would be bidens. They've added two more—Pink Treat is fine, with pale pink flowers striped with darker pink, with yellow centers. But Fireworks caught my eye for its vivid yellow and orange star-shaped flowers that would be great along with your fall mums. We were told it'll take hard frosts, so give it a try for Autumn sales!



Bill: Lastly for me is just a shout out to the Sol Luna interspecific New Guinea impatiens series Danziger launched last year. I got a bunch of samples and they were one of the best plants in my garden last summer—in the ground and in big containers on my patio. But that's not what I wanted to call out.



Mike Fernandez took us back behind the display greenhouse to see the results of a trial on Sol Luna he ran to see if a nice crop could be grown in large containers (gallons and 8-inch) using fewer inputs. He showed us 1ppp, 2ppp and 3ppp for three or four colors and I have to say the single liner per pot looked excellent across the board. And with only one per pot, the retail shelf life increases because not as much water is sucked up. If you grow Sol Lunas or plan to, reach out to Mike and the Danziger team for more details.

See all these and more in our Danziger **VIDEO.**



Perennials +

Chris: We had another grueling commute ... meaning a 100 ft. walk ... to get to our next stop, ThinkPlants, which occupied a tent in front of Danziger's greenhouse. ThinkPlants, if you recall, is a marketing organization that represents a wide range of breeders. They started out focusing on perennials, but now they include potted plants, shrubs ... I don't know if there's any real limit to what they'll include, as long as it's good quality. I believe there are now 22 companies in the program!

Bill: Twenty-two companies is a lot. Thankfully (for us), not every company had products in bloom and on display in the tent. Watch our **VIDEO** for a good visual overview of the companies represented and a glimpse of many of the new varieties. Chris, since we can't do it all, how about we cover two each?

Chris: Perfect. And if you're allowing me to go first, I'll grab not a perennial, not a pot plant ... but a strawberry! Yes, Strawberry Pretty Tasty Ruby, from Terra Nova. Granted, you may only think of them as perennials, especially heuchera. But strawberry is a perennial, after all. The name describes it well—pretty deep red flowers that eventually produce loads of small, tasty fruits.



Bill: I'll go with Heuchera Heucherette from PanAmerican Seed because I recently hosted a **VIDEO PODCAST** with PAS where we discussed the crop and some of the cultural best practices to grow them to their full potential. They're small heucheras, perfect for cool-season mixed containers and available as Pink or Red (flower colors).



... and MORE Perennials!

Chris: Gaillardia, Bill, from Danziger, but a perennial, so it was in the ThinkPlants tent. The

Gusto series roots well and is easy to grow. And in the garden it has an attractive mounded habit. And because it “buries its dead” (meaning the new blooms cover the old ones), it looks fresh longer. The new one is Swift Saffron, and it joins Lemon, Orange Zest and Paprika Sweet Chili.



Bill: I guess I’ll stick with small plants and call out lavender Scent Mini Blue from Syngenta. I think this might have been the first plant of the trials that was presented to us for use in “cell packs,” as well as quarts. I still like buying packs so that made me happy. Anyways, it’s a small Angustifolia type hardy to Zone 5 and apparently has a high oil concentration because without brushing up against it, the fragrance hit us from about four feet away. It’s first-year-flowering and billed as the “next generation” of the Scent series.

Take a **VIDEO TOUR** of the ThinkPlants tent.



Around the World in a Few Hours

Chris: We departed the stops behind Garlic World and crossed Highway 101 and headed to Syngenta, which owns the old Goldsmith greenhouse range, the spiritual home of “pack trials” ... and did you notice, Bill, that I didn’t revert to that old name a single time this year?

Bill: Congratulations for finally joining us in the 21st century, boss!

Chris: Hey, I can keep up with the times! ... even if I can no longer keep up with you in a 5K foot race. Anyway, Syngenta had a BIG offering ... more than 50, at our count. And as always, we can’t cover them all, or you’d be reading this until Week 24 and our video would be a four-part mini-series. So again, let's each pick our four favorites, Bill. (Don’t worry, folks, you’ll see just about everything in our **VIDEO**). Take it away, young William!

Bill: Well, if you’re letting me go first , I’ll tell our readers about the fourth member of the Sunfinity sunflower lineup: Single Yellow. Nine years ago, Syngenta released Sunfinity Yellow Dark Center, a seed-raised sunflower for garden use. It was a gamechanger! Then they dropped a vegetative variety on us called Double Yellow, which had a fuller, better branched habit. Then, last year, we saw the second seed type—Yellow-Red Bicolor—at CAST and it was definitely one of the top intros of the year.



Now, for 2027, is yet another Sunfinity called Single Yellow. And it’s a vegetative one bringing the collection to four (two seed and two vegetative).

Chris: I bet pansies were on the benches at the first Pack Trial and they're still a staple bedding plant! And Syngenta has the industry-leading series, Delta Pro. We were shown a few new pansies—nothing in the Delta Pro series, but we were shown two new Delta Speedy colors, Violet Face and Marina (plus Yellow with Blotch Improved). Speedy aren't named for earliness; they’re named for being tolerant of short days, so you can grow them for winter production. And in the Select series, which are a bit too vigorous to fit in the Delta series but have unique colors, we get Select Orange with Purple Wing (perfect for any sports team with purple and orange colors) and Select Pink with Blotch.





Crushing it!

Bill: I started off with a gamechanger in Sunfinity, so I might as well go with another series that was revolutionary at the time of launch: vinca Cora XDR. That's the one with high resistance to aerial phytophthora. It's been around for many years and is still an active breeding program, with Blush Splash introduced for 2027. It was described to me as light peach with a strawberry center.



Now, because I obviously like to push the envelope when it comes to my "four" selections, I'll add more vinca to this write-up. In the Blockbuster series (for any growers who don't have a need for the disease resistance of Cora), Syngenta is adding four new unique colors—Blackberry Crush, Raspberry Crush, Blueberry Crush and Papaya Crush. You've got to see these in our **VIDEO** because the colors are pretty wild in the world of vinca.



Chris: Hey, Bill! You know what we haven't been shown a single time this year until now? Geraniums! Five days of CAST and not a single pelargonium presented to us until our very last stop, where Syngenta shows us two. Their Pretty Little series, which are compact interspecific geraniums designed for small pots, gets White Splash (below). It joins Pink Splash. "Splash" defines the bold red star in the center of the flower. And the somewhat larger Moxie interspecific series gets Strawberry Splash—again, with a bold red center surrounded by pale pink.





Some more "eye candy"

Bill: My third choice from the trial is lantana Hot Blooded Mega Red. It's 25% bigger than the original Hot Blooded red lantana but with the same vibrant color.



Chris: I remember that year! They had a toy drumkit set up in the lantana display, and somebody figured out that I'm a drummer, and that Syngenta's Chad Underwood and Garett Vaisman are also drummers, and so we all had a little drum-off ... "little" being the operative word, because that was a tiny drum set! But we had fun, as you can see in **THIS VIDEO** of the epic event.

Oh, as for my next Syngenta variety, how about iCandy begonia? They've added their first "XL" iCandy ... as you can guess, it means extra vigorous. The color is Deep Yellow, with bright yellow flowers (in doubles, semi-doubles and a few singles) and dark foliage, for a nice contrast. Grow it in gallons or baskets.



Bill: I could easily call out another two or three new intros from this trial but I promised four. So, my fourth is both of Syngenta's huge combo programs—Kwik Kombos and Patio Playbook (Here's a **PODCAST** about them both.) Both programs are constantly evolving as new genetics are introduced and mixes trialed and added. I just want to shout these out because one of the over-arching trends or big ideas I've picked up over the course of the week in Cali is that although we've seen combo programs and recipes for many years, there's still as much of a need (possibly even greater) for more.



I've talked to growers out here who are in search of fresh recipes to include in young plant and finished programs. I've heard from breeding company product managers that growers are hungry for recipes and retail buyers are challenging them for new combos for all seasons and price points. I think we'll continue to see combo programs evolve and increase for years to come.



Concluding our world tour ...

Chris: I'll wrap up our Syngenta coverage with a dahlia ... because we haven't seen enough dahlias this season! But seriously, this is a pretty one, with a unique name: Coffee Shop Lavender Latte. They say on their signage, "dark-roast foliage, double-shot blooms." Clever! It's a nice lavender-pink double bloom that starts out a bit tan in the center ... almost like a latte with lots of milk. We're told it's the first in the Coffee Shop series.



See all these Syngenta varieties and more in **HIGH DEF VIDEO!**



In Closing ... For Now

Bill: It's weird to close out our coverage of 2026 California Spring Trials, because we'll definitely write more about the new plants, trends and industry news we saw and heard out here, release dozens of video shorts and reels, post tons more photos and talk about it all for at least 12 more months until we come back for CAST 2027. This is really just the beginning.

Chris: Correct, Bill! For my part, I'll be turning all 24 of our videos into Shorts and Reels, so you can enjoy bite-sized snippets from every stop. I mean, I don't know how else we can tell this story other than strapping notes about Trials to the lets of carrier pigeons.

Bill: Literally thousands of industry members have seen our industry-leading coverage, Chris. We've already had videos and slideshows get more than 3,000 views each just on **INSTAGRAM** and **FACEBOOK!** The amazing **VIDEOS** produced by Osvaldo and Jen will be seen by many more thousands and our e-news have been and will be read by growers around the world. It's actually a huge responsibility we have to report back to the 99% of our industry who don't have the opportunity to travel to California for this event.

Yet, I don't feel anxiety about it ... instead it's a lot of fun. Hard work, for sure. But fun! Because I love this industry and feel tremendous gratitude to have the opportunity to come out here with you crazy Bobbleheads and catch up with dozens of friends across the industry on our trip up the coast.

Chris: Agreed! Thanks for coming along on this journey with us, folks. Because of your kind words and good vibes, we might just do it again next year! But first, I need some sleep! See you

next week in my regular email, *Acres Online*, and Bill will see you in *Tech on Demand*.



See you next time!

Chris, Jen, Bill & Osvaldo



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