

Spring Trials Day Two: Seventeen companies, no April Fools

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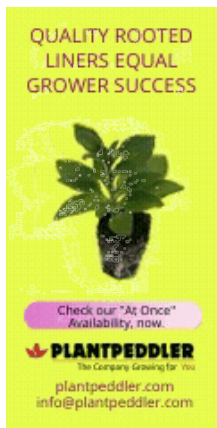


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Saturday in California

Chris: Day Two of the Bobblehead's Spring Trial coverage is in the books. A good day, Ellen, with two stops and 17 companies under our belt.

Ellen: Was it really 17, Chris? Or are you just April foolin' me?

Chris: It was 17. And funny you should bring that up. A few of my victims, er, fans, were disappointed that I didn't deliver one of my trademark April Fool's emails today. Truth was, I just couldn't think up anything clever enough to share with them. They deserve the best and I just couldn't figure out who should buy whom or what wacky new variety should be launched at Spring Trials. How does one top Titanic Begonia and the Van Wingerdens selling out to a Russian billionaire. But I've got another year for inspiration to strike.

Ellen: You sure thought somebody had pulled an April Fool's on you when our microphone case went missing. I've never seen you so panicked.

Chris: I almost soiled my trousers! We'd have had to do the rest of the trials in pantomime, or with subtitles or something. Thankfully, it was just a good Samaritan who thought it had been abandoned and who put it away for safe-keeping. But it caused me a minor heart attack.

Ellen: I was sorta hoping maybe we didn't find the case and hence no video and, well, actually getting to bed at a decent hour this week. Alas! We were saved from that fate. Anyway, getting on with it ... We saw lots of great things today. Let's start with the start: Green Fuse.



Green Fuse

Chris: I'll touch on a few annual introductions: First, Cruze Control Calibrachoa. This is an upgrade of the Cruze series. But while more controlled in habit, don't see it as compact or dwarf or anything. Company owner Steve Jones says he likes "homeowner habit" in his offerings and Cruze Control is still big and showy. The series has 13 colors, including the new Grape Delicious—Delicious being Green Fuse's designation for anything with an eye.



Also in petunias, Good and Plenty gets a pretty Purple Splash, while the naturally compact QT series gets two all-important colors: Blue and White. The Vivid Verbena series gets one of those “delicious” eyed additions—Purple Delicious (and there was a very cool Vivid Swirl White Lavender in Steve’s First Looks soft introductions). Lastly in annuals, the Fuchsia New Windchimes series will be seeing larger flowers, as evidenced by Pink Lilac.



Ellen: Lots to see in non-annuals, too. I was enamored with the Rex Begonias in Green Fuse’s Lifestyle Plants category. They’ve added a new series, Dibs, that has large-and-fabulous sizes. A few of the Shadow Kings, namely Rathko and Moonlight, more accurately fit into this larger-sized grouping and have been moved over. The Dibs are First Looks (i.e. soft intros), but I look forward to them getting a full intro next year. Meanwhile, the Shadow Kings get two new ones: Spearmint and Strawberry Sherbet.



Yes, we made a video about it all [HERE!](#)



Perennials

Meanwhile, in perennials, they've got some great new lavenders. Paris is a big upgrade in *L. dentata* offerings, with early flowers and a more compact habit. The Lavish subseries in the *L. stoechas* Madrid series gives you compound flower heads with a whole bunch of additional bracts, not just the ones at the top. Madrid Lavish gets Pink and Purple. And the Lupine Staircase series had some serious interest last year in its soft launch. It's good to go with lots of supply behind it and should be a big—and easy—seller.



Chris: Those lupines are amazing. One of the memorable introductions from last year and sure to be in big demand.



Floranova

Chris: Okay, a stroll of about 50 ft. and we're in the other greenhouse at the old Twyford location that Green Fuse calls home to see a new tenant: Floranova. Now, Floranova, a long-time Spring Trials participant, skipped the 2016 event because they were in the process of closing their Lompoc facility and moving its operations to Chile. But they're back with a vengeance for 2017, with plenty to show. Ellen, what did you like best at Floranova?

Ellen: Hands down, the all-new Crackle & Pop series of antirrhinums, aka snapdragons. Get it? Sure, the name is awesome, but it's a good series of eight colors: early flowering, uniformly matched, with well-branched and strong stems. A model pack series. Plus, the name!



Chris: Ha! That will make our Top 10 Clever Names list, for sure! Looking back at my pictures, I like one of the items that Floranova would have shown us last year had they had a trial: Quantum stellar F1 geraniums. Quantum has star-shaped flowers, which you usually only see on vegetative geraniums. Not sure if it's the first one from seed, but it's unique. The plants are naturally compact and start with three colors and a mix. Another intro from last year that you may or may not have heard about is Cosmos Apollo. Bred for dense branching and plenty of big flowers with little gapping, Apollo is a knee-high garden flower in three colors and a mix.



Ellen: Another one that caught my eye was the Freefall XL pansy, the "next gen" of Freefall. They've got the same mounding/trailing habit as Freefall, but with bigger flowers. Four colors in those. Cheerleader African marigold is Floranova's first dwarf African. First point to know about it is the secondary flush of flowers comes up fast and keeps the plant flowering. It's been proven in summer trials, too.



Chris: Nothing new in their Vegetalis patio vegetable line, unfortunately, but there are plenty of good existing varieties. And we can expect more in the future.

See what we saw in this artfully crafted [VIDEO](#).



GroLink

Chris: Finishing up the Green Fuse/Floranova stop, we hopped in the rental minivan (hey, we're here to work, not look cool) and drove 20 minutes west to Oxnard and GroLink—our biggest single stop of the trip. Fifteen companies under one roof! A 15-ring circus! Ellen, there's no way to cover each company without writing 10,000 words. So how about we each touch on a few of our favorites from the stop without worrying about which company it comes from?

Ellen: Does it have to be a plant? Because I want to mention the farm-to-table theme at Hort Couture. I should say, farm-*in*-table theme, because the table had place settings with the entrée plates, "salad" and "sweet" accompaniments (all Hort Couture varieties) literally placed flush down into the table. Each one was one of their new varieties. Innovative! And a great idea that garden centers can create in their own stores.



As for varieties, they've intro'd 72 new culinary herb and vegetable varieties in the last two years, all meant to help IGCs differentiate themselves from both their competitor IGCs and the big boxes down the street who all offer pretty much the same genetics.

The table is the centerpiece of the [VIDEO](#) we made about it all!



The bluest of blue flowers

Chris: A great display! Also the canning jar chandeliers hanging over the table, which I'm sure you'll feature in a future issue of *buZZ*! But I'm glad you picked that because that means I can pick my favorite intro of the trials thus far: *Corydalis Porcelain Blue* from PlantHaven. This Zone 6 perennial has vivid blue flowers on a blue-green, ferny foliage. It's said to have come from plant finder Dan Hinkley, who found it in China. I think the species is *curviflora*. We were told it's easy to grow, is great for spring color, but takes heat and humidity, too. To top it off, it'll grow in full sun or full shade. All that and bright blue flowers? Sounds like a winner! We show you this, plus some other PlantHaven varieties, in this [VIDEO](#).



Ellen: And that's not an April Fool's, either! Let's go from fabulous blue to righteous red. And that would be found in Suntory's Surfinia Trailing Red petunia. With a slightly lighter, brighter red than Surfinia Dark Red, it's got a fuller habit and more of an "architecture" of a petunia that folks are looking for. It's a great plant—basket, pot, landscape—it's a winner. Wanna see a [VIDEO](#) of it?

I also want to mention a few varieties from Hort Couture, namely a naturally dwarf cyperus cleverly named A Lil in da Nile, a spectacularly unusual, extra-large dusty miller called Crushed Velvet (pictured below) and the ornamental oregano Zest Pink Ombre.



Peppers and clean air

Ellen: But let's move on from HC to PRUDAC, or the Production and Research for Urban Decoration and Consumption—otherwise known as patio veg! Two cool veggies from them today; Pillar Pepper, a sturdy sweet pepper with fruit produced along the main stem, and Quattro Allium—think flat-leaved chives with a mellow oniony-garlicky flavor that's suitable for both indoor and outdoor pot or container growing. Tasty! (Watch us taste it in this [VIDEO](#).)

Chris: You covered a bunch right there, Ellen. I also was going to mention that cyperus with the Top-10-worthy name. I might toss in the ornamental oregano they had, too. I'm a sucker for that chartreuse foliage with pink-tinged hop-like bracts, or whatever they are. But for my next pick, I'll do as you did at the top and pick a display, not a variety. Florist, the gerbera people, had several pretty introductions. But they're also promoting the air-purifying properties of gerbera, which NASA research has show is effective at removing benzene from the air and they also transpire oxygen for longer than other flowers.

We've got a [VIDEO](#) featuring Florist!

Ellen: What's on the schedule for Sunday, boss?

Chris: Let me see ... We drive north and do three stops: Windmill, the new Chisan Orchids and Dümnen Orange at Edna Valley Vineyards. You up for it?

Ellen: I suppose I don't have much of a choice, do I? Will it be Carrow's or Starbucks tomorrow for breakfast?

Chris: Seeing how they don't have Waffle House out here, you pick. Okay, folks, see you Monday morning with our Day Three coverage.

Chris and Ellen

Handwritten signatures of Chris and Ellen in black ink.

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