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From Spring Trials

IN THIS EDITION

Floricultura: Westhoff, Elsner-PAC,
Beekenkamp, Plug Connection,
Gediflora, Flamingo Holland
Sakata
American Takii
HMA
Hilverda Kooij

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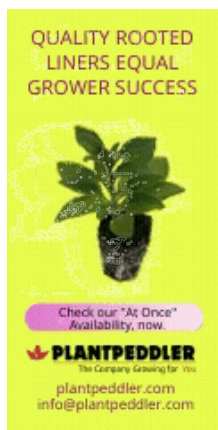


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Day 4's three stops

Chris: Greetings, Spring Trials fans, and welcome to Day 4 of our almost-live coverage. Ellen, Jen and I have hit another, what, Ellen, 10 plant companies at three locations?

Ellen: I'd say that. Plus, I've almost hit a wall. You?

Chris: What? Don't tell me you're starting to wear down! We're just getting warmed up! I'm thinking another week would be just about right.

Ellen: I'm no spring chicken, Chris. But, I have to say, melatonin has saved me from the horribleness of jetlag.

Chris: Speaking of jetlag, we blame it on one goof we made on our first day. We accidentally called PanAmerican Seed's Lucky Star pentas Lucky Strike. Don't know how that happened—none of us smoke. Also, a few corrections about a variety we saw on day 2 at PlantHaven, Corydalis Porcelain Blue. The genus and species *Corydalis flexouosa*. It's USDA Zone 5. And it was bred and selected by Hillier Nurseries in the UK, not Dan Hinkley. Hey, we just report what we're told. If we find out we got erroneous info, we'll fix it.



On to Westhoff

Ellen: Okay, Chris, on to the business of the day. Like Trials! We started our day at Floricultura, that ginormous orchid grower in Salinas.

Chris: Let's each take a company and share a pick item or two from it, shall we? Starting with the first company we encountered, Westhoff, a German breeder of all sorts of vegetative annuals. One can't ignore the fact that they've come out with a Night Sky competitor called the Constellation series. They've got three colors, each with a constellation name: Aries is purple, Gemini is violet and Virgo is dark blue. Each seemed to have a slightly different sky pattern. How production regime impacts the pattern will have to be determined.

Also from Westhoff, I liked their Begonia RiseUp series. It's a range of hybrid begonias in nine different colors. Claim to fame is lots of branching and, hence, lots of flowers. Ellen and I captured it all on video [HERE](#).



Ellen: Moving on to German breeder Elsner-PAC. Big news from them is the new New Guinea Impatiens series called Impacio. The major point here is it's cold tolerant. Grow just as you would any other NGI series, but just cooler. That's good for smaller growers who may not have the facilities to grow in different temperature zones. One zone grows all. 16 colors.



Chris: Or for any grower who wants to drop the thermostat a few degrees to save energy. Or get a week or two headstart on the competition.



Beekenkamp

Next company at Floricultura was Beekenkamp, a Dutch breeder known for begonias, of which we saw quite a few on display. But it's their dahlias that caught my attention. They've got four different series under the La Bella family name in four sizes. From small to large: Piccolo, Medio, Grande and, brand new for this year, La Bella Maggiore. It's big! For 8- or 10-in. pots. The series starts with six colors, including two bicolors.

Oh, I also want to show you one of last year's intros that they didn't have on display last year: Dahlia La Bella Medio Fun Yellow Picotee.



Isn't that a pretty color? That's an endcap item if ever I've seen one.

Ellen: Going down the line, the next exhibitor is Plug Connection. They had just one new item this time around—SuperDwarf patio tomato. Plug Connection is known for its Mighty 'Mato grafted tomatoes, those monstrously large tomatoes. SuperDwarfs are not grafted and get to be just about 3-ft. tall. Tomatoes of all sizes, too—plus with delicious flavors, they say. Eight varieties in all.

Chris: One other Plug Connection tidbit: Sales manager J. P. Williams wants the word out that, "We are not Altman Plants." He pointed out that it was Ken and Matt Altman who bought Plug Connection last year, not Altman. They remain a separate independent company. And while

Altman is a customer, only about 20% of Plug Connection's production goes to that nursery. The remaining 80% is available for the rest of the industry. That includes some products from their other new acquisition, EuroAmerican Propagators (now Plug Connection's Bonsall facility), such as Gomphrena Pink Zazzle—one of our favorite plant names ever.



Gediflora

Ellen: Next in line was Belgian mum breeder Gediflora. First to know about them is that their stock and cutting production has moved to Alva, Florida. Second to know—they have a few new varieties of Belgian mums to offer this year: Yasoda Pink (FYI, Yasoda is their best-selling family) is new and a great color addition. And third to know, they've added Red to their Vigorelli family. It's a late (mid-October) crop great for the South—and they last until Thanksgiving.

Chris: Ellen, you left me to mention their best introduction. Thanks! Remember last year, they introduced a beer called Mum No. 1, brewed with an extract from actual Belgian mums? (you can view that video [HERE](#)). Well, they've turned mum extract into a food business. Not only are they still making beer—40,000 liters last year—they're now making chocolates featuring a beer-infused cream center (delicious) and even sausage and liquor, they say.

But last stop: Flamingo Holland. Highlight to me of their trial was new calla lily colors. They had several—all nice—but most impressive was Ivory Art, a very white calla with maculated foliage. It's white, not cream. They were in white pots and the flower was pretty much the same color. Impressive!



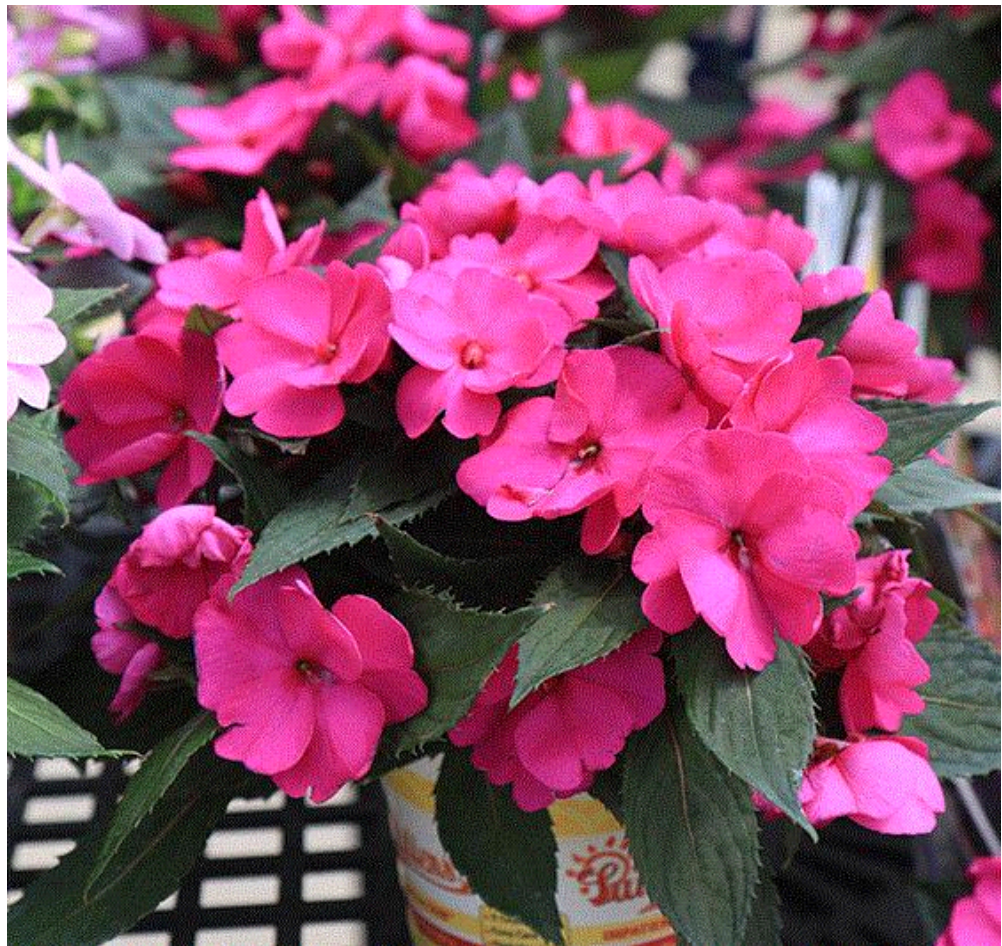
Sakata

Ellen: Moving on to Sakata, one of our favorite stops of Spring Trials due to all the vivid annual color. This year, they're celebrating their 40th anniversary in the U.S. The first surprise was yet another Profusion Zinnia All-America Selections winner, Profusion Red. Haven't they had Red before?? No. They've had Cherry. This is a scarlet red. And a true winner.



Chris: Amazing how many AAS awards the Profusion series has seen. Six since 1999, when Cherry and Orange earned their awards.

I'll make mention of the latest SunPatiens, Compact Purple. The Compact subseries features 16 colors now (at least at my count of what they had in their display). And interestingly, they've applied for a utility patent for this plant, for future protection of the variety and its traits.



Ellen: Did you know that the 40th anniversary is celebrated with the ruby? Sakata is honoring

that with lots of new red intros. In addition to the Profusion Red, they have Party Time Ruby Punch and Red Bolero Coleus, Harmony Double Red Anemone (along with Blue and White) and a whole bunch of others. They're seeing ruby red at Sakata!



Candy Tops

Chris: We've only seen one snapdragon so far this trip—that was the cleverly named Crackle & Pop. Sakata introduced a series that fits between their knee-high Sonnets and compact Floral Showers: Candy Tops. It's claim to fame is somewhat less apical dominance, with secondary flowers that come on quick for plenty of color. The series starts with five colors.

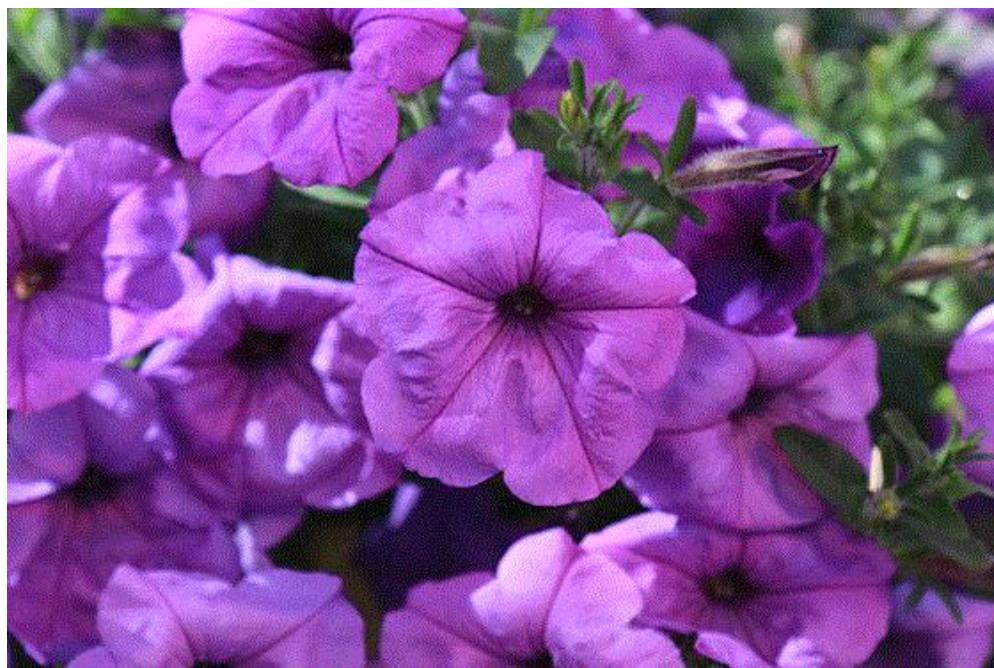


Ellen: Don't forget Sakata is a powerhouse in vegetables, too. First among the new intros is a tomato series called Little Birdy (pictured below). Three varieties of the little dwarf determinate tomatoes, which include Red Robin, Yellow Canary and Rose Finch. They also have a larger grape tomato called Ruby Crush, a hot pepper called Durango, a Thai hot pepper called Crackle and a Japanese mustard called Miz America.



Chris: Makes me hungry just thinking about it! Luckily, we have plenty of snacks while we write. If you want to see our video of all these Sakata introductions, click [HERE](#).

Okay, last stop of the day: American Takii. This traditional seed company didn't have many introductions this year, but they showed several really nice experimentals to show what's in the pipeline. However, the one new introduction they did show was really interesting: Petunia Evening Scentsation. First, it's blue. Okay, not blue-blue, like the Corydalis Porcelain Blue we showed you a few days ago, but as mauve blue a petunia as we've ever seen. Second, it's an AAS Regional Award winner for 2017. Third, it's got a lovely fragrance. It's a stand-alone variety, as I think it should be. This is an endcap item!



Ellen: Totally agree! Let's not forget about those experimentals. While we don't get into those so much in this space, do know there are some cool geraniums, cannas and sunflowers in the pipeline. Get your first look at Evening Scentsation and more in our [VIDEO](#).

HMA

Let's go on to the next company at Takii, HMA. These guys do propagation of all sorts of annuals and now loads of succulents. Chris, what do you remember most from HMA?

Chris: They displayed on a giant pyramid, which they were calling a volcano; but regardless, it was covered in succulents! Never seen so many in one place. Now, I'm not a succulent expert (that would be my wife), but they did point out a few varieties that are unique, such as Black Knight Echeveria and Sunburst Aeonium. If you're looking for succulent liners, HMA might just have what you need. They've been building up stock to make sure they can meet your needs, they say.



Lastly, in another Quonset at Takii, is Hilverda Kooij, a Dutch breeder of numerous genera. For instance, helleborus. They showed us Winterbells, which they say will bloom for much of the year. They've got a dahlia series called Rebel. I asked, "Why Rebel?" They answered, "Because we must be rebels for introducing a dahlia series!" Finally, a pretty pot carnation series called Flow. Want to see Winterberry and these others for yourself? We captured them with our video camera [HERE](#).

What's on for Day 5?

Ellen: Loved that pot carnation. Such a great, new look to it, in my opinion, with that umbel of flowers. But the next big question is, where to next, Chris? How do we spend Day 5?

Chris: Syngenta, Proven Winners and Danziger, according to the schedule that Zurko arranged. More good stuff, I'm sure. Of course, I want to remind our dedicated readers (and even those who barely tolerate our blitherings) that this from-the-road report is only a portion of our coverage. We will offer more varieties and ideas and news in future issues of *Acres Online* and *buZZ!* And our main coverage will appear in the July and August issues of *GrowerTalks* and *Green Profit*. Oh, and our perennial expert Paul Pilon will be out here, covering those crops in more detail than we're able. In other words, this is just the tip of the iceberg!

Ellen: See you at breakfast, Chris! See you tomorrow, folks!

Chris and Ellen

Handwritten signatures of Chris and Ellen in black ink.

Chris Beytes
Editor & Publisher
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