

Spring Trials: Bonus Day 7 feat. Proven Winners

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Ellen: Hey, Chris?

Chris: What's up, Ellen? And also, why are you stealing my line?

Ellen: What's up? CAST was only supposed to be six days long. Yet here we are, writing something called "Bonus Day 7." You said it'd be worth it, so tell me and the folks what we're up to here.

Chris: Well, it's like this: Our goal with this week's writing was to show as many new varieties from the California Spring Trials as possible—just as we normally would in a normal year. And we've done that. But there's one company missing: Proven Winners.

Ellen: Of course they're missing. They dropped out of trials after last year and created a big digital, online new variety presence instead ... some think they have a crystal ball or had read it in Nostradamus or something.

Chris: Very true. And because of that, they weren't included in our regular coverage—although they did advertise in it with a nice big banner ad right at the top, for which we are grateful. Helps keep the lights on!

But one of the things I'd talked about with them was how would we actually get to see their new varieties. The plan was to take a drive over to Michigan and Four Star Greenhouse sometime this spring, to see and report on them, and also check out some of the expansion Four Star has been doing.

However, with the stay-at-home order lasting who-knows-how-long this spring, there's no guarantee when or if I can do that. So I figured the best way to ensure that our readers get to see Proven Winners' newest offerings is to include it here.

Ellen: Seems like a sound plan. Plus, Proven Winners is one of the pioneers of "Spring Trials."

Chris: Indeed! They were one of the first of the vegetative plant companies to exhibit at what was then Pack Trials way back in 1997, if memory serves. So they've got the Trials street cred, you might say. And, face it, they're an important brand and our readers want to know what they have coming for 2021.

Ellen: You're right on that. So tell us what they've got for us this year. Something colorfully spectacular, I'm sure. And with fun names!



"Impactful" varieties

Chris: We tackled Proven Winners the same way we did all the other plant companies: via a Zoom interview, in this case with Dave Konsoer, Director of Sales, who gave us the highlights—or as they're calling them, the "impactful varieties"—for 2021.

First up, two new begonia series. The first is Double Delight, a tuberous begonia suited especially well for hanging baskets, judging from its habit. It's vigorous, but still looks good in the Proven Winners Grande container. Showy double flowers have a nice citrusy scent (or so they tell us; Zoom doesn't yet offer smell-a-vision). They'll take part sun to sun conditions and we're told they've been selected for improved Xanthomonas resistance. Two colors: Blush Rose and Primrose.



Begonia Double Delight Primrose

Double Up is a vegetative wax (*semperflorens*) begonia with fully double flowers on tight, ball-shaped, medium-sized plants. Three colors: Pink, Red and White. Pink is green-leafed, while Red and White sport chocolate-bronze foliage.



Begonia Double Up Pink

Here's a new genus for Proven Winners: Euryops, a "southern staple" due to its excellent heat and humidity tolerance (although you northern growers can enjoy it, too). This one is called High Noon, an improvement over the generic selections, with shorter internodes and a tighter plant habit. It flowers earlier and longer, too, and needs no deadheading. Great on its own or in combos.



Euryops High Noon

Another heat-lover is Ruellia Machu Morado. This "Mexican petunia" selection is sterile and has no runners, so you don't have to worry about it spreading or becoming invasive. This one might not do so well in the north, as it wants it hot to do its best blooming.



Ruellia Machu Morado

Coral Sun is a very nice color addition to the popular Superbells Calibrachoa series. Flowers have a coral rim and yellow center.



Calibrachoa Superbells Coral Sun

Normally, I say "not interested" when somebody mentions an improvement to an existing varieties, but when Dave said this particular existing variety just happened to be Proven Winners' No. 1 best seller, well, my ears perked up and my pen came to the ready. It's Supertunia Royal Velvet Petunia and the improvement is for a tighter, less stringy habit, better branching and more flowers, and earliness. Best of all, Royal Velvet Improved retains the same rich color of the best-seller it's replacing.



Petunia Supertunia Royal Velvet Improved

Lastly, in annual highlights, Lobularia Moonlight Knight is the first vegetative lobularia (alyssum) with yellow flowers! Well, subtly "soft" yellow flowers. It's not as vigorous as Snow Princess, but it still has good heat and drought tolerance. It should pair exceptionally well with blues, purples and other yellow flowers.





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Chris: Once in a while a Proven Selections offering gets called up to the bigs, and that's what happened to Colocasia Coffee Cups and Heart of the Jungle. They fit the tropicals trend and make great big thrillers for your patio planters (big meaning 3- to 5-ft. tall and wide!). Coffee Cups has cup-shaped leaves, while Heart of the Jungle's are the more traditional heart-shaped.



Colocasia Coffee Cups

Here's another foliage plant generally used as an accent or component plant, but it's so interesting, it might just get to star in its own containers. Ipomoea Sweet Caroline Medusa Green features unique seven-lobed palmate leaves. Dave says it looks great in a hanging basket on its own.



Ipomoea Sweet Caroline Medusa Green

Speaking of accent plants, Proven Winners has rolled 40 different ones into a new brand called Proven Accents, giving consumers the confidence that the items they're adding to their combinations have the same quality as their branded flowers. Proven Accents will get their own pot and tag.



Perennials and woodies

I'm leaving the thorough coverage of Proven Winners' new perennials and Color Choice shrubs to my experts Paul Pilon and Matthew Chappell to cover in their newsletters, *Perennial Pulse* and *Nursery & Landscape Insider*, respectively. But I'll include a couple here that Dave highlighted, for those of you who yawn at annuals.

Summerific, their perennial hibiscus collection, gets two new colors, including a breakthrough: Summerific French Vanilla. The name gives it away: flower buds start soft yellow and flowers open to a creamy French vanilla color with a deep red eye. You won't mistake it for a tropical hibiscus, but getting any sort of hint of "yellow" into a perennial hibiscus is something.



Hibiscus Summerific French Vanilla

The second Summerific color is Spinderella, an interesting pink and white pinwheel of color. Both Summerifics are super hardy in Zones 4 to 9.

And, of course, hydrangeas. Yes, the world needs more—if they're good, that is. Wee Bit Giddy and Wee Bit Grumpy are a pair of *H. macrophylla* offerings that have tight, compact growth, glossy foliage and strong stems. Giddy's mophead flowers are a rich red-pink, while Grumpy's are deep purple. Zones 5 to 9.



Hydrangea Wee Bit Grumpy



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An edible and how to learn more

Chris: I told Ellen I'd handle all of today's write-up and I guess that means I get to finally do an edible! It's an easy one: Berried Treasure Strawberry, introduced a couple years ago in the Proven Harvest line. Berried Treasure White and Pink join the original Red. Flowers are semi-double and abundant; fruit is red and tasty.



Strawberry Berried Treasure White

As for videos and other resources, Proven Winners has that well in hand. You know their Certified Garden Center program? They've been making training video for 18 years and in that time have educated 80,000 retail staff about Proven Winners. They're applying that experience to the grower and broker world at www.provenwinners.com/ondemand. There, you'll find an ever-growing array of tools to help you learn more about their new introductions. Right now you'll find some videos, brochures and PowerPoints; soon they'll be adding a photo library, brokerage webinar training and all sorts of robust educational tools. Bookmark it!



Last thoughts on the event that wasn't

Chris: Okay, Ellen, NOW we're officially done with the California Spring Trials (and today's bonus newsletter) for 2020. Any last thoughts on the event that wasn't?

Ellen: Last thoughts? Well, when you came up with this hair-brained idea I thought you may have been suffering a fever and a dry cough. But hey, look at what we all just did? We pulled the dang thing off! Great leadership, bossman. And let's not do it again.

Chris: Not a chance! It's much more fun to report live from California, seeing and smelling the real plants! And I miss making our Bobblehead new variety videos together.

Now, as for you, our loyal and long-suffering readers, I hope you got something out of our seven days of coverage. Click our names below to drop us a line about what you liked best or want to learn more about, or typos you found particularly humorous or whatever. If you missed a day, all the newsletters are archived at www.springtrials.com. The videos are all at www.youtube.com/growertalks under the Spring Trials 2020 playlist. And Bill Calkins will continue to post cool new varieties to our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/springtrials) and [Instagram](#) account (@growertalksgreenprofit).

For Ellen, Jen, Bill and our dedicated behind-the-scenes crew at Ball Publishing, we'll see you down the road!

Thanks for reading! See you next time,

Chris, Ellen, Jen & Bill

Handwritten signatures of Chris, Ellen, Jen, and Bill in black ink.

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