

CAST Day Four: Benary, Pacific Plug & Liner, and Syngenta

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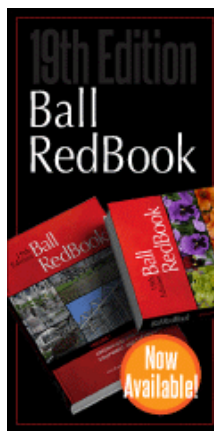
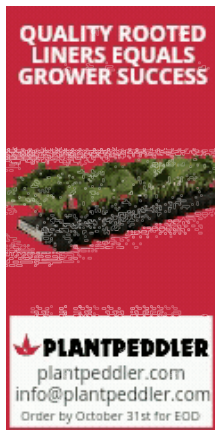
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Bonus: Bobblehead Bloopers

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The Final Countdown ...

Chris: Well, Young William, it's Friday and we've wrapped up the final day of our California Summer Trials visits, having dropped in on the list of companies above. Any thoughts on your first California Trials since we last traveled together way back in 2007?

Bill: Two things come to mind: First, the schedule was way more intense than I expected. No down time whatsoever. I was hoping to have time for garlic ice cream or maybe a few antique stores. Besides that, I was genuinely impressed by the very clear product positioning. Every new intro seemed to have a specific place in a product assortment, retail format or competitive target. Does that make sense, boss?

Chris: Your fond memories of garlic ice cream do not make sense. Perhaps you remember it better than it really is. But, yeah, this was a year when every breeder pared their display back to the bare essentials of plants and message, and to good effect. No fluff, no distractions. Then again, I miss the nice buffet lunches many of the trials offered. COVID put a damper on the entertainment.

Bill: I wonder if the focused approach will pay off when it comes time for distribution reps and growers to make decisions? Less distraction might be a good thing.



Benary Brings the Heat

Chris: A good segue into our first stop of the day, Benary. What was interesting is that Benary originally told us their trial would be a self-guided tour, and maybe there'd be water and granola bars available. Well, that might have been the worst-case pandemic scenario, but when we arrived, we saw tents and beverages (adult) and plenty of staff—even CEO Matthias Redlefsen was on hand to greet us! It was as busy and vibrant a trial as we'd seen all week.

Variety-wise, let's start with Marigold Super Hero. It's the upgrade of the venerable Hero French Marigold series, which debuted a couple of years ago as a major improvement over the former series. Super Hero gets two new colors, Gold, and Deep Yellow, plus an improved Deep Orange, which now has plenty of seed availability.



Marigold Super Hero.

Bill: Seeking out for “new” labels, I pointed out Gazania Zany. Chris said he didn’t think that the series was new at all. Turned out the “new” sign indicated a cool technical story: BeGreen. Gazania seeds are traditionally sold raw, but Benary is now offering them in treated form—using their new BeGreen technology. What’s BeGreen? Well, sustainability is important to Benary—and when they analyzed existing seed treatments like coating, pelleting and priming—they found a lot of chemical ingredients, even microplastics. They went to work developing greener treatment options—with first priority being that the treatment is as good or better than the existing treatment. The result is BeGreen, used on all of their seed that needs any sort of treatment.

Chris: Very cool! Who even thinks about chemical use at that level? Benary, I guess. Okay, here’s a fun improvement: Ptilotus Joey. Do you remember when this was introduced back around 2010? A fascinating plant, but the habit was a bit rangy. Well, Joey has been improved for much better branching, as is evidenced in the great-looking, floriferous quart pots they showed. It will make a good retail display. And nearby, they showed Joey Improved in mature tubs that were planted back in April, which show that the consumer is going to get a spectacular show in the garden.



Ptilotus Joey Improved.

Bill: Also new at Benary were new colors and improvements to the Verbena Vectura series. These are the low-growing, but tight and controlled, varieties. Blue Wing and Violet are new for 2022, while White, Soft Pink Eye and Dark Red have been improved.

Two other intros that stood out to me because of their silver color and unique structures were Helichrysum Sylvita, components plants available in both Basket and Patio types. The Basket type looked like a cool filler/spreader and the Patio type was more mounding for big deco pots.

Chris, you want to tackle the Nonstops?

Chris: Perfect, since Nonstop Begonias are the perfect wrap-up of our visit, as they're the iconic Benary brand. Rose Picotee and Salmon are the two newest colors in the original Nonstops; while the larger, hanging basket-oriented Nonstop Joy series gets three additions: Joy Orange, Joy Red and Joy Rose Picotee for five colors total.



Nonstop Rose Picotee (left), Salmon (right).

Click [HERE](#) to view our Benary video showing these varieties and more.



Pacific Plug & Liner Notes

Chris: Okay, our next stop is just down the road a few minutes. Pacific Plug & Liner, which was hosting their own display, was also home to the magazine plant lines of *Sunset* and *Southern Living*, and bulb and perennial company Flamingo Holland. Bill, give us your favorite PP&L intro.

Bill: I love it when you let me lead off with my pick. Not hard for me here—it has to be Echibeckia Summerina Sunchaser. This echinacea/rudbeckia cross is a big plant with wild-looking, huge blooms. You'll have to see the photos or watch our video to see this thing. It actually looked like a silk plant, but was most certainly real.



Summerina Sunchaser Echibeckia.

Chris: Those flowers were fully 6 in. across!

Bill: Joining Sunchaser in the echibeckia collection are two other new Summerinas—Sunreef, with red centers in the blooms, and Sunbeat, with bright yellow blooms and dark eyes.

Chris: I'll pick their new delphinium as my favorite. It's part of their Delgenius collection and it's called Glitzy, with rich blue-purple flowers and a white "bee" in the center. Delgenius are bred to have multiple flower spikes instead of one dominant spike and then little or nothing in the way of other flowers.

And while I'm talking plants with spikes of flowers, how about the new lavenders from PP&L?

They call the collection Lavenize—a fun way to turn a plant into a verb. Lavenize has four varieties—Fully, PomPom, Elegance and Power—that bloom from early spring through June in that order. Oh, they also showed a tiny one, Liliput, that should be great for small kitchen window pots. It's coming in 2023.



Lavender Lavenize from PP&L.



Southern Living, Sunset and Flamingo Holland

Bill: Under the *Southern Living* and *Sunset Magazine* Plant Collections tent, we saw two nice intros that are in both plant programs. Both are exclusives from their new partner PlantHaven. Shasta Daisy RealFlor Real Goldcup has yellow/gold flowers that have the thickness of marigold flowers on a tall, architectural plant that will grow up to 3-ft. tall and 18-in. wide. You can cut the flowers for arrangements, too. It's certainly different than any shasta I've seen before.



Shasta Daisy Real Goldcup.

They also showed Gaillardia RealFlor Marmalade, which had excellent longevity in trials. The plants we saw had been in bloom for 90 days, they said, and it didn't appear to be stopping anytime soon. Being Zone 5 hardy and in both the *Sunset* and *Southern Living* Collections means they'll look great in gardens across most of the country.

Chris: Our last visit at PP&L was in the Flamingo Holland tent, noted for various bulb crops, as well as perennials. In bulbs, they showed Asiatic Lily Trendy Nicosia, which has pretty soft pink flowers with white centers dappled with burgundy.



Asiatic Lily Trendy Nicosia.

In perennials, Geranium Intense is a perennial geranium in neon pink that they say will bloom all season. The plant we saw had already been in flower for three months and it looked like it had just gotten started.

Lastly, there's Heuchera Frilly. You know what a loofah looks like? Well, then you've seen Frilly. Tightly growing, small foliage in a tan color—quite the novelty!



Heuchera Frilly.

We put together a video with the highlights from all three of the PP&L Exhibitors. Check it out [HERE](#).

Okay, Bill, you get to kick off our last stop of the entire trip, but also a big one and an important one, Syngenta.



Syngenta Never Slows Down

Bill: I thoroughly enjoyed our visit to Syngenta. The team put a lot of thought and effort into the COVID-friendly layout, grouping new varieties in one area, planting up garden beds to show landscape performance and offering plenty of photo ops.

One of the first new varieties we saw was Petunia Fun House Potpourri, a unique color-changing stand-alone (for now), with flowers that change from yellow to yellow, and red and finally all red, depending on PGRs and environment. Syngenta technical folks have plenty of cultural information for manipulating color on this vegetative petunia and in the future we hope to see new Fun House colors.



Petunia Fun House Potpourri.

Chris: More petunia additions include Sanguna Mango Punch and Banana Candy (Sanguna is their workhorse vegetative petunia) and Dekko Sorbet (Dekko is their landscape performer). But most interesting (other than Fun House, that is) is the new Itsy White, which joins Magenta. Itsy is sort of the Fantasy Petunia of the vegetative world (if you remember the old Goldsmith variety). But Itsy White has an even better use than as a petunia: that is, as a bacopa replacement. Because the flowers look just like a bacopa, except without the drawbacks of bacopa. You can do a nice multi-color petunia pot, add in some Itsy White, and they peek through adding an airy touch.



Petunia Itsy Burgundy, White.

Bill: I'm going to talk about a few seed items this time. Cleome Sparkler 2.0 is an improvement to the old series that's been upgraded to the point that the seed no longer requires priming, making availability a bit more reliable. New to the series is Purple.

We also saw a new Marigold series called Endurance. It's an interspecific hybrid—basically, an African marigold bloom on top of a French marigold plant, with the timing of a French marigold. That makes it a triploid, meaning it's sterile, so it keeps on blooming. Sunset Gold, Orange and Yellow are available for 2022 and will be able to handle cool temps and high light.



Marigold Endurance.

Chris: If you recall the Zenith Marigold series, you know the great garden performance of a triploid. You could call Endurance the next generation of triploids. And, interestingly, Zenith was an interspecific hybrid, but nobody used that terminology back then—they just said triploid.

Bill: Third on my list of interesting seed intros is Torenia Hi-Lite, another all-new series. It's been bred for bigger, brighter colors, plus heat and sun performance. I think torenia is underused and I hope this series helps grow shopper demand. The series launches with six colors. It will replace the Dutchess series.



Torenia Hi-Lite.

Chris: Back to vegetative varieties, Syngenta's wide range of geraniums gets numerous additions. For instance, the interspecific Calliope Medium series (slightly more compact than the original Calliope) gets Dark Red Dark Leaf (because customers like that darker foliage), while the original series (now called Large) gets White (we were surprised it didn't already have a white). Exotica Starry White is a star-flowered novelty geranium, while Exotica Coral Sunrise resembles the old Vancouver Centennial, but with showy coral flowers. The medium-vigor interspecific, dark-foliaged Mojo series gets Hot Cherry and Dark Pink. And the interspecific ivy geranium series Caldera gets a new Salmon and Red (Pink was introduced in the 2020 pandemic season).



Geranium Mojo Dark Pink (left), Hot Cherry (right).

Bill: We've seen quite a few new lantana at CAST this year and the intros continued at Syngenta. Gold is new for their flagship Bandana series, the one with the more compact, mounding habit. It's a rich gold color and will fill any size pot, from quarts to gallons.

Chris: Did you know Syngenta has five "profiles" of lantana, from compact to sprawling? Anyway,

for all the Syngenta introduction, watch this stellar [VIDEO](#) that Jen Zurko shot and edited.

Well, Young William, there are so many more varieties we could write about, but all good things have to come to an end.



Closing Time ...

Bill: What's that have to do with this newsletter? Ha!

Chris: Funny! I heard that one on Sesame Street. But as I was saying, time to wrap up and with a few observations. It was a challenging year for all the trials hosts. They didn't know if California would even allow such a gathering, but they had to grow the plants anyway, just in case. Then things loosened up very quickly and attendees decided at the last second to come, so trials hosts had to pivot to provide all the expected amenities. Thankfully, the growing conditions were excellent and the plants looked great everywhere (despite a run of 100F temps last week). Most of all, everyone was smiling—no masks, no distancing, we were shaking hands, and hugging and catching up—plus, we had just enjoyed a tremendous spring ... I don't know if I've ever seen more happy people at work! But the big question now? Will there be a Summer Trials next year or will the event return to its original April dates? We will see. Any last thoughts, Bill?

Bill: Just a thought that's run through my head so many times over the past 20 years, and one that I was reminded of quite a few times this week: We are truly blessed to work in an industry that brings smiles to so many faces. The happiness at CAST this year seemed to be mostly due to the fact that we're once again free to hang out with our friends without staring at computer screens. It was an awesome week, boss. And extra thanks to you and Jen Z. for welcoming me back to the Bobble Bus.

Chris: Our pleasure! Now, whether or not it was a pleasure for our readers and viewers ...? Well, let us know! Comment on the videos or drop us a line. And if you want some real fun—if you want evidence that Bill and I are not perfect hosts and presenters, click [HERE](#) to watch the Bobblehead Bloopers video.

Lastly, rest assured that this is NOT our only coverage of CAST. We'll have full articles in the August and September issues covering annuals, perennials, shrubs, potted plants and edibles. Plus more in our regular newsletters. So this is NOT the last you've heard from us. Well, it's the last from the Bobbleheads—until next year, that is!

Thanks for reading! See you next time,

Chris, Jen & Bill

Chi Jen Bill

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