

California Spring Trials Day 5: Benary, Cohen, Hishtil, Jaldety, Nir, PRUDAC, Saad Assaf

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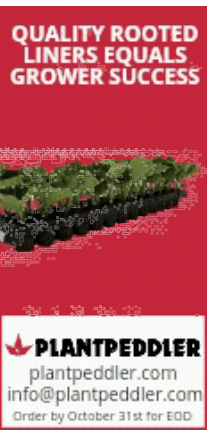
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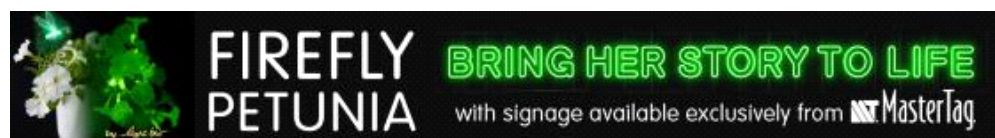


## The Final Countdown

**Chris:** Final day of CAST, Bill!

**Bill:** When we started out this morning, I thought we'd have an easy day—a few companies and a few varieties at Suncrest Nursery, then a quick look at annuals at Benary. Boy, was I wrong! We saw six companies at Suncrest, including a new canna supplier. Then Benary had loads of intros in both seed and vegetative annuals, perennials, herbs ... and, of course, awesome food.

**Chris:** That's why we make Benary our last stop—the great lunch and interesting beverages that go along with their key introductions. But let's dive into the day's first stop, Suncrest Nursery, where we met with five different breeders from Israel, plus a veggie breeder from the Netherlands. Oh, and remind me to remind you to offer up your thoughts, and vice-versa, of the whole event before we wrap up at around 11:00 p.m. or midnight or whenever it is.



## Saad Assaf, Cohen, Jaldety

**Bill:** You got it, boss. We walked into the greenhouse at Suncrest and immediately looked at an unexpected curveball: canna lilies from unrooted cuttings. New at CAST this year was breeding company Saad Assaf, a longtime amaryllis breeder and producer (biggest one in Israel, they say) who's introducing a line of cannas to North America called Canny. The story here is that they've found a way to let the canna rhizome eyes start to sprout, then take those cuttings and ship them to growers. The stock is virus-free, and so are the cuttings, so the finished plants should also be cleaned.







You stick them in 50-count cells to root, then pot up into 6-in. pots, or maybe three per 10-in. You can finish them in about 10 weeks. The range of cannas was extensive, with some two dozen varieties—green and bronze leaf, variegated, lots of colors and bicolors ... and producing big, vigorous plants.

**Chris:** It was fun to see a new company (at least to us). Oh, they also told us they're working on seed-raised cannas, with seed available soon.

After Saad Assaf, we visited a company we were much more familiar with, Cohen. Cohen produces URCs from genetics from companies like Westhoff and Suntory, which we'd seen in earlier trials, so we didn't spend time on that. But they also produce varieties bred by famous British breeder David Kerley, so we were definitely interested in seeing what Mr. Kerley has been up to. One such line is Tumbelina Double Petunias, which looked quite uniform and tight for doubles, which are often a bit rangy and uneven. The flowers were clean and consistent. Two examples are intros for 2024: Scarlet Ripple (red and white bicolor) and Matilda (yellow).



**Bill:** Cohen also offers genetics from the Israeli company Breier & Son, who's offering a stunning new bidens in the Bee series called Giant Yellow. Giant flowers on a compact plant that requires no PGRs is certainly a message that will resonate with growers.





**Chris:** After Cohen, we strolled across the greenhouse to Jaldety, which covers a huge range of crops, from annuals and succulents to perennials and indoor plants. We saw two new coprosma that start small, but really size up to shrub size in a few years. Pacific Night has glossy green and burgundy foliage, and Eclipse matures to show vivid green-and-pink tones.

And in their perennial line, Jaldety showed a new *Salvia microphylla* called Pink Mulberry. It's a tall garden type with small foliage and nice pink blooms.

**Bill:** My favorite "story" from Jaldety involved four tradescantias (or setcreasea, if you prefer) for indoor or outdoor use: Zebrina, Zebrina Bordeaux, Green White and Tricolor Power. These aren't unique or exclusive, but Jaldety has re-released them after many years to fit the indoor foliage trend. These foliage plants were very popular 30 or 40 years ago or more, but sort of fell out of favor. Now, they're back because the market has circled back around to them.



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## Hishtil Herbs

**Chris:** Herb specialist Hishtil was next as we worked our way around the greenhouse at Suncrest, and they immediately reminded us about their commitment to organic production and eco-awareness. Not all of their herb production is organic, but they're working in that direction, and they're certified by many of the world's countries and organizations—I couldn't help but notice the USDA Organic logo on one of their banners.

**Bill:** One of Hishtil's current initiatives is to select for dual-use herbs—those that are both tasty AND pretty. Many of their offerings bloom, some quite vigorously. They're also gathering up drought-tolerant herbs into programs. We'll be watching for these collections. But until then, I'll share a couple new herbs for 2024. First is *Santolina vividis* Lemon Fizz, a chartreuse Mediterranean herb with a distinct olive-like flavor. Another unique herb is Rosemary Green Ginger, which lived up to its name as a culinary rosemary with ... you guessed it ... a gingery aroma and taste.





**Chris:** Salvia Snowflake definitely fits the description of dual-use, with its attractive silvery foliage and a delicate sage flavor. I didn't try it, but of course, Bill did—I was too busy taste-testing some of Hishtil's mint offerings. Two of my favorites were Mojito and Black Currant.



## **PRUDAC Veggies, Nir Waxflowers and Off to Benary ...**

**Bill:** I think I was caught up in Hishtil's display gnawing on herbs while you and Jen hit the PRUDAC space to hear all about their small vegetable programs.



**Chris:** I always have to ask what PRUDAC stands for. It's "Production & Research for Urban Decoration & Consumption." I just call them a compact veggie company—they specialize in tabletop, window and patio veggies. They've got several new cherry tomatoes coming: Sunny Drops is a teardrop-shaped tomato in Red and Orange with sweet fruit; Heartbreaker Dora has heart-shaped fruit that are more acidic; Heartbreaker Vallery is a basket or tub type; and for the sweetest fruit, try Tiny Temptations, which gets loaded with very small fruit with very big, sweet flavor—the sweetest of all their offerings, they say.



One interesting note about their tomatoes: They're breeding to produce unripe fruit that's lighter green than usual. Why? So customers can see them against the foliage and know they're buying a bearing tomato. I've never heard of another breeder doing that.

**Bill:** I'll wrap up the Suncrest stop with Nir, a 40-year-old family nursery in Israel specializing in Australian natives like anigozanthos and wax flower (*chamelaucium*). They continue to innovate in their wax flower collections with varieties for cut flower, ornamental potted and landscape uses. The flowers are so elegant and unique that it's a shame to only use them mixed with other



flowers in bouquets. The presentation in gallon pots and photos of how they perform in dry landscapes really makes me want to give them a big shout-out in this newsletter and encourage you to look up Nir and reach out. There's opportunity here.



**Chris:** I especially liked the small wax flower bush in the clay pot—that would look good in an IGC.

Okay, on to Benary! This is the only place where California's recent flooding reared its ugly head—we were warned to come to Benary from one direction, not the other, because the road had been washed away when a dam let loose. Yikes! But we made it unscathed and dry ... in fact, the weather was flawless as we toured. Speaking of touring, Benary had loads of offerings! We hit many of them in our video (link at the bottom), but for this newsletter, let's pick three each and see what happens.



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## Benary ... Our Final Stop

**Bill:** I'll start the "pick three" with a series addition. I'm pretty sure we've never written about Benary's trial without mentioning something new from the Nonstop Begonia family because it's an industry leader and a very active breeding program despite being 50 years old or more. That's impressive! New this year within the Joy basket types is Peaches & Dreams, an absolutely beautiful offering that shades from pale yellow to apricot to pale pink, with the characteristic huge blooms of Nonstop. It's dramatic!





**Chris:** That was one of my pick items at the trial, darn you! But thank you for making it easy: I'm picking Stonehedge Begonia, a new series that could borrow the "hedgiflora" moniker from one of Ball's Tidal Wave Petunia. This two-color (more on the way) series is said to grow to as tall as 5 ft., with large, dark, textured leaves, big blooms and yet a tidy habit. I'll be curious to see how Stonehedge works as a blooming hedge in the landscape.







**Bill:** Stonehedge is going to make a statement in gardens, while the new Highflyer trailing pansy collection is going to shine in baskets and window boxes. Launched with five colors, Highflyer Pansies join a couple other trailing series on the market and were described to us as more trailing and spreading than mounding, with larger flowers and better flowering across the entire basket with no “bird’s nest” effect—meaning bare on the top.





**Chris:** We started our tour of Benary outdoors in their extensive cool-crops display, which was dominated by primula, two existing series (Crescendo and Piano) and four—yes, four!—new primula series: Sibel, Bonneli, Elodie and Fruelo. Hmmmm. Alrighty. Anyway, they're beautiful, and looked pretty uniform across all offerings. Sibel is a *P. polyantha*, with flowers held above the foliage on umbels. It gets seven colors and a mix. Bonneli is a bread-and-butter series of *P. vulgaris* (AKA *P. acaulis*) with an impressive 19 colors.





We were particularly drawn to Bonelli Sailing, which features pale blue flowers etched with deep purple veins with golden centers. Wow!





Elodie is another *vulgaris* that blooms a bit later. And Fruelo, another *vulgaris*, is the latest of all. Why so many primula? Because they're already strong in other early spring biennial crops like pansy, viola and bellis, and they wanted to expand their footprint in the category.

**Bill:** I think we've hit on the most exciting new products at Benary, so I'll wrap up my picks with a couple concepts that got prime real estate at the trial—Mix It Up and Benary To Go. Both are intended to inspire growers and retailers to find more creative ways to use the company's plants to drive consumer attention.

Mix It Up is a combination recipe concept using Benary's assortment of seed and vegetative products in artistic ways. They worked with a handful of different designers to come up with unique combos that all look different and don't really follow the spiller, filler, thriller approach, which was refreshing to see. These recipes are meant to generate ideas and aren't available to order as "kits" or anything like that.



Benary To Go is an idea that was shown last year, but has been refined and seemed much more refined this time around. The Benary product team culled through their full assortment and identified candidates for potted gift plant programs. Add an upgraded pot and some signage and products like platycodon, ptilotus, succulents, sunflower and primula and you'll have a whole new package to promote to your retail customers. Benary To Go helps take the guesswork out of gift program assembly.

**Chris:** For my final pick, herbs are another category Benary wanted us to focus on—they've got a good range of vegetative herbs from their partner in Benary +, Volmary. Season Me! Fusions are what they call an herb combo pot concept designed to inspire growers and retailers to get more creative with their herb offerings.





The recipes, including “Little Italy,” “Grill Master,” “Stew on This” and “Oh, Crepe” are easy for consumers to relate to. Again, it’s not an ordering program, just an inspirational concept. I did like the barrel-look pots for it!



### **That's a Wrap ... But We'll Be Back!**

**Bill:** As we wrap up our week touring 2023 California Spring Trials, I should probably stop and reflect back on all of the innovations we’ve seen, and the proud folks we’ve met with—anticipating strong future sales and product positioning to help keep assortments organized. I told someone today that CAST is a combination of science and stories. However, having just finished the full tour and running on a pretty major sleep deficit, it’s going to be tough to start calling out favorites because I’ll definitely miss a bunch of key intros. What about your recap, Chris?

**Chris:** I have to agree—it’s hard to sum up the week we’ve just had, even though our loyal readers probably expect it. In fact, the No. 1 question we get is, “What have been your favorite things so far?” I feel guilty when I can’t answer that, but truthfully, after a week, it’s all a blur. We need to process it, go through our notes, and reflect on the impact the various varieties will have on the market. Because it’s easy to pick something that has stuck in my head—Turtle Love

comes to mind—but is that going to move the needle? Change the industry? So what Bill and I will both do is recover from the trip, reflect on our notes and photos, and get back to you next week in my *Acres Online* newsletter with a summary and some thoughts. Sound good, Bill?

**Bill:** Works for me, boss. We should let Jen and Osvaldo shout out a few faves, as well. They worked the whole trials just as hard as we did. Which reminds me ... if you want to see the lovely and talented Jennifer Zurko keeping Chris and me in line while sharing variety info AND see Osvaldo Cuevas' amazing camera handiwork, watch our full video coverage on the **GROWERTALKS YOUTUBE CHANNEL**.

**Chris:** As video producer Osvaldo would say, "That's a wrap" on CAST 2023. Thanks for hanging with us. And, please, comment on our videos below—maybe tell us your favorites! We'll see you again next year, Lord willin' and the crick don't rise!

- **Suncrest Nursery—SIX Companies**
- **PRUDEC**
- **Benary**

Thanks for reading! See you next year!

Chris, Jen, Bill & Osvaldo

The image shows four handwritten signatures in black ink. From left to right, they are: 'Chi' (for Chris), 'Jen' (for Jennifer Zurko), 'Bill' (for Bill Calkins), and a stylized signature for Osvaldo Cuevas.

Chris Beytes  
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