

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Trial in Paradise

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Tropical back yard? Resort property in the islands? Nope. It's the "Season Premier Trial Garden" at Costa Farms in Homestead, Florida, site of the industry's first flower trials of the year. Along with this pretty garden setting (complete with observation tower), there are standard row trials in full sun and shade, for the complete trial experience.

According to Dr. Kate Santos, director of Research & Development for Costa, the company decided to build the extensive garden for two main reasons: in-house performance trialing and consumer satisfaction trialing.

"This gives us an opportunity not only to evaluate all the new genetics coming out of the industry from a production standpoint," explains Kate, "but then also, how is it going to perform for the end consumer?"

A third reason Kate didn't mention was the timing of TPIE—the Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition, held in Ft. Lauderdale every January. The show attracts the Who's Who of growers and retailers, many of whom make the hour-long trek south to visit and tour Costa. Some big buyer meetings are also held during the event, so it seemed natural to add a California Spring Trials-style garden as an added attraction. Breeders and brokerage firms like the early-season exposure, too; 19 supplied just under 400 varieties for this year's trials. Most are 2010 Spring Trial introductions that are coming into the market for 2011.

Costa will have two trials per year, a winter trial and a summer trial. The winter trial was planted Week 45, and by Week 3 was just coming into its glory despite cold temperatures that required some frost protection. They'll leave the plants in through the summer to give them a good testing in the heat. **GT**

Editor's note: Want to see the garden and hear Kate talk about the trials? Go to the [GrowerTalks YouTube channel](#).