

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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New Varieties: The Spice of Life

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Sakata's Mark Seguin fields questions about the latest SunPatiens, Compact Purple, from sales representatives from Vaughan's Horticulture and McHutchison during this year's California Spring Trials. Along with their many new introductions, which included yet another All-America Selections-winning Profusion Zinnia (Red), Sakata was also celebrating their 40th year of having a U.S. office (although they've sold their varieties in North America for much longer than that).



Held April 1-6 along the California coast, this year's Spring Trials featured 16 locations (mainly greenhouses and a pair of wineries) from Oxnard in the south to Gilroy in the north. Some 60 companies exhibited their new and improved flower, plant and vegetable varieties, hardgoods and services.

"Another great year" was how Keith Cable, head of Vaughan's Horticulture, summed up the 2017 event. "It provides a great opportunity to spend time with our sales teams, see key customers, visit breeders and vendor suppliers, and get a leg up on the latest product introductions, which were numerous this year. It gives everyone a jumpstart for the coming season."

Anne Leventry, President of PanAmerican Seed, one of those 60-plus exhibitors, reports that attendance was down slightly (4%) from last year to about 1,150 visitors. Most agree the decline is due to companies sending fewer representatives, not to fewer overall companies attending. As Anne puts it, "I would say that the quality of the visitors is still very high. We had all of the [North American] distributors come through with most of their sales reps. We also had a lot of growers. And of course, many retailers and journalists." She added that the international visitor counts seem higher, although there's no data on that yet.

Regardless of numbers, the important of Spring Trials to the industry—especially at the breeder and broker level—can't be overstated. Says Anne, "It is still an extremely important marketing event for us. It is our one

opportunity to see the entire spectrum of the industry in just one week. It's the only venue available to us where we can meet with all of the distribution sales reps across North America and show them our new products. Because distributors are our primary vector to the market, this is critical. We also get a lot of growers who are making decisions about what to add to their programs and we have the opportunity to influence them. It's also a great opportunity to get feedback on products, trends and generally what is happening in the industry."

For full coverage from the event itself, check out our Spring Trials website, www.springtrials.com, for our daily coverage, photos and videos from each trial. And put Spring Trials 2018 on your calendar: April 14-19. **GT**