

GROWERTALKS

Features

7/1/2018

The Best of the Best (and Some of the Rest)

Chris Beytes, Ellen C. Wells & Jennifer Zurko

The 2018 California Spring Trials, held back in mid-April, has long been in the books, with nothing left to do but compile the highlights so you can begin placing your Spring 2019 orders with your favorite plant company sales representative.

This year's six-day event featured 16 stops and 63 participating exhibitors—of which 50 were plant companies. So let's see: If each company had 10 new plants, that's 500 introductions ... and some had 20 or 30... no wonder this trip is such a killer!

Luckily, your three scribes have 44 years of combined Spring Trials experience, which we use to cut through the marketing jargon and me-too intros and instead seek out only products that we think will excite consumers, fill untapped niches and—provided you grow them well and display them creatively—make you money.



IDM-resistant impatiens update

PanAmerican Seed had a “back-room” display of experimental impatiens downy mildew (IDM)-resistant impatiens that were originally featured in the March issue of *GrowerTalks*. The display included some commercial comparisons, all inoculated with IDM. It was pretty evident that the experimental impatiens truly does have “high resistance” to the disease, as the breeder has

said. PanAm's plan is to do serious in-house testing all this year and then some grower trials next year. And they're doing production trials for seed production and quality and such. Things look promising, but of course, like a good wine, they won't introduce it until it's time.

Notes about the season

As for the 2018 version of Spring Trials, the big news was ... there was no big news. There was no one topic that had the crowds buzzing, no one introduction that was a sure-fire hit. The biggest challenge faced by attendees is squeezing 16 stops and 63 exhibitors spread between Oxnard and Gilroy into six short days and juggling that schedule based upon which days each Trial is open (some start a day or two later, others close a day or two early).

The Trials themselves looked fantastic, having enjoyed a good growing season that left Trials hosts not having to make excuses about plant quality. The crowd was about the same size as usual—call it 1,500 or so industry folks,

primarily broker sales reps, plus growers, retailers, academics, press and assorted other interested parties. As always, there's a good contingent of international visitors, especially since the event seems to be attracting more global breeders, such as new plant exhibitors Nir from Israel (an Australian plant specialist) and Evanthia from the Netherlands (a young company that specializes in seed-grown summer cuts, flowers and foliage).

But enough chatter. On to the plants!

Memorable Intros



Vinca Tattoo Series (PanAmerican Seed)

Memorable as much for the name as for the unusual colors, Tattoo is basically a Pacifica Vinca but in really interesting patterns that take vinca “into a different realm,” as Birdie Lenard-Fountain says. It comes in four colors: Papaya, Raspberry, Black Cherry and Tangerine. Tattoo should catch the eye of Millennial customers and they say they’ve got good POP available, too.

Pericallis Senetti Magic Salmon (Suntory)

The flowers start out periwinkle blue, then fade to salmon in the center as they age. Its coloring reminds us of Pantone’s Color of the Year for 2016, which was a combo of Rose Quartz and Serenity. Chris thinks its tone is reminiscent of sidewalk chalk art.

Basewell (Dümmen Orange)

Dümmen Orange has introduced a whole new product form: a rooted cutting, in gel rather than soil, shipped to you in strips that fit in Visser’s AutoStix automatic cutting transplanter. Basewell moves the costly sticking and rooting processes offshore, where labor is both less expensive and more available. Dümmen applies a water-holding gel to the roots before shipping to protect them.

Basewell comes in 51-count strips or individual cartridges, which can be planted by an ISO transplanting robot or stuck by hand. Dümmen is offering their entire spring annual (except begonias) line in the Basewell form.)

Cost? Figure somewhere between the price of a callused cutting and a rooted liner, they say.

Roses True Bloom Collection (Plug Connection)

Bred by Ping Lim of Altman Plants (owner of Plug Connection), True Bloom was bred to have the disease resistance of a shrub rose and the look of a hybrid tea. Judging from the sample plants on display, he may have managed it. They’re even branding the rose, and growers will be required to use True Bloom pots. It will be interesting to see if Altman’s can compete with the established rose brands.

A little history: Ping came to Altman in 2012 from Bailey Nursery, where he also bred their “Easy Elegance” line of roses, which we saw at the Bailey display up at Pacific Plug & Liner. We were reminded that they have similar characteristics to True Bloom. So what’s the difference between the two lines? We emailed Ping to find out.

Ping said that he did, indeed, breed both roses—“and proud of it!” he added. Both breeding programs were focused on producing a healthy bush with better flowers—more like hybrid tea roses. But while Easy Elegance is tagged as “a shrub rose with the look of a hybrid tea,” True Bloom emphasizes a higher petal count and a great flower/foliage ratio.

The biggest difference is heat tolerance, Ping says. True Bloom was bred and selected in Southern California to thrive in the warmer zones of the country (where Altman does much of its business). Easy Elegance emphasizes cold tolerance all the way north to Zone 4.

Bottom line? Two good rose lines selected for regional excellence by one respected breeder. Of course, Easy Elegance has been on the market since 2004 and offers two dozen colors, while True Bloom is brand new to the market and has yet to prove itself to consumers.



Petunia SuperCal Premium Series (Sakata)

This sub-series of SuperCal feature big flowers in special colors. The five that start the series are Cinnamon, Bordeaux, Caramel Yellow, French Vanilla and Sunray Pink. We felt they all offered a very defined look—autumnal, you might say, especially when combined. If you want a good look for late summer/fall baskets, a mix of these might do very well.

Interspecific Geranium Moxie! Series (Syngenta)

Consider it a compact version of their very popular Calliope series; same look, coloration and garden performance, just naturally smaller. You can actually fit them on a shipping rack! Oh, and the Deep Red is just as deep a red as the Deep Red in Calliope. Six colors in the series.

Proven Harvest Edibles (Proven Winners)

It was only a matter of time before Proven Winners introduced some sort of edible line. But they waited until they could source truly special genetics—those with “stories and success,” says John Gaydos. And they have! They’re calling the new line “Proven Harvest” and it starts with five varieties in three genera.

First up are the two strawberries with the clever names Berried Treasure Pink and Berried Treasure Red.

The next is Amaze! Basil. Bred by the University of Florida, they say it’s the first downy mildew-resistant Italian sweet basil. It’s from cuttings, not seed, which means it’s sterile and late-to-flower, so keeps on making tasty foliage.

Last but hardly least are two tomatoes, Garden Gem (snack-sized semi-determinate) and Garden Treasure (full-size determinate). Also from UF, these were bred by Dr. Harry Klee, who uses a combination of gene sequencing and traditional breeding to produce tomatoes with maximum flavor and excellent disease resistance. His breakthrough even made the cover of *Science* magazine.

New Series



Snapdragon Snaptini (Syngenta)

This compact snapdragon series joins Snaptastic, their intermediate series. Snaptini has strong central leaders and plenty of side buds, for continuous color in the garden. Includes six colors and a mix.

Lobularia Easy Breezy (Ball FloraPlant)

The first lobularia for BFP looks to be a good one: Heat tolerance is said to be outstanding and its habit is easy to control. And because lobularia cuttings can be a challenge in shipping, BFP has done post-harvest testing on URCs to make sure they get to you, the grower, in fine fettle. Two colors: Pink and White.

Interspecific Geranium Pretty Little (Syngenta)

An even smaller interspecific hybrid than their new Moxie! series, the flower stalks are much smaller, hovering the umbels just above the foliage. And there are loads of flowers! Pretty Little starts with one color, Pink Splash, but we're sure there will be more to come.

Dahlia City Lights (Selecta One)

The first dark-leafed series that Selecta One is calling a darker version of their existing Dalaya series. Four colors in the series; Red was recently named a Fleuroselect Gold winner.

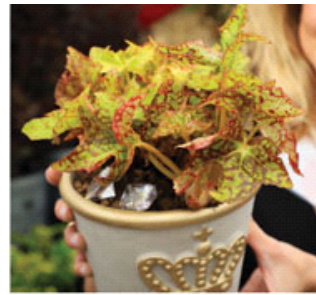


Verbena Cadet Upright & Firehouse (Ball FloraPlant)

The main message for both of these verbena series is heat tolerance that rivals BFP's EnduraScape series. As the name implies, Cadet Upright is an upright series for quarts, gallons and patio containers; conversely, Firehouse is more suited for hanging baskets; it replaces Aztec. Cadet offers seven colors, Firehouse nine.

Vinca Blockbuster (Floranova)

This F1 vinca series has got good branching and is compact, like their Vitesse series, but it's got plenty of vigor and big flowers—easily 2 in. across. It was bred in Costa Rica. The series offers 10 colors.



Ivy Geranium Reach Out (Floranova)

Also an F1 hybrid, this seed series competes against Tornado, offering a compact habit that doesn't tangle on the bench. The six-color series offers excellent seed quality and is a low-cost option for growers wanting an ivy geranium for any container, from jumbo packs to baskets.

Petunia Tea (Beekenkamp)

Beekenkamp compares Tea to the leading vegetative petunia series in Europe, Surfinia, but say they went for a more compact, mounded habit, which gives the series good rain resistance. Ten colors.

Begonia Crown Jewel (J. Berry Nursery)

A brand-new series of rhizomatous begonia hybrids, all four are named for different gemstones. The frog-green one is called Positively Peridot. Other "jewels" include Enduring Onyx, Tenacious Topaz and Joyful Jasper. Originally from Mexico and Central America, these hybrids were bred in northern Alabama for heat tolerance (by the same breeder who did their Black Diamond Crape Myrtle, by the way). They have some blooms, but really, it's all about the foliage with these colorful begonias.

Petunia Tickled (Thompson & Morgan)

We saw a few new petunia series, but none rivaled the Tickled series for sheer size! This open-pollinated series sprawls out to 2 meters across (about 7 ft.); T&M had them trained up in cages to form petunia towers. The series starts with five colors.



Begonia Tophat (Syngenta)

An interspecific seed begonia, Tophat is a companion to their Topspin series of fibrous seed begonias, only bigger. Much bigger! Tophat compares to Big and Megawatt, except the flowers are 20% larger, they say—like a fibrous begonia on steroids! The series gets three colors: Scarlet, Pink and—most notably, White, the first white in the giant interspecific begonia class. Tophat is green-leafed; maybe they'll introduce a bronze-leaf series to go with it.

Petunia Success 360, Success HD (Benary)

Benary has the Success multiflora petunia series; now they've added a grandiflora version called Success 360. (The 360 indicates its round, mounded habit.) There are 13 colors in this series.

If you want a really compact grandiflora, the new Success HD fits the bill. HD means high density, for pot-to-pot production. These are genetically dwarf and need no PGRs. Seven colors, including Rose Star, which earned a

Fleuroselect Gold.

French Marigold Super Hero (Benary)

The German breeder has introduced a French marigold series called Super Hero in honor of the company's "super hero" and fourth-generation owner Fritz Benary (who saved the company when the Russians annexed Germany into East and West after World War II). It's also an obvious upgrade from the old Hero series from Bodger, which Benary acquired in 2009 when they bought all of Bodger's seed genetics.). Super Hero has large flowers and a compact, but not dwarf, habit. Eight colors.

Notable New & A+ Additions



Catharanthus Soiree Ka-wa-i-i Red, Light Purple, White Peppermint [experimental] (Suntory)

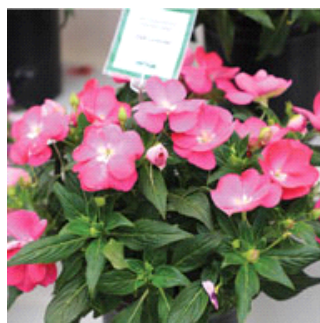
Suntory has added a few new colors, plus showed an experimental that really caught our eye, to their tiny-flowered vinca series.

Petunia Easy Wave Red Improved, Violet Improved (PanAmerican Seed)

Two serious improvements in one of the most popular industry brands—and you can see the difference! (That's Improved on the left, original on the right). Easy Wave Red as gotten a 10% improvement in useable plugs, from 85% to now 95%. The color is more intense, and the plant has better Botrytis resistance. Violet has been improved to have a flatter growth habit, with more vibrant flower color.

Calendula Power Daisy Orange (Kientzler)

From respected plant breeder David Curley, Orange joins last year's introduction Sunny. Highly mildew tolerant and a great bright color.



New Guinea Impatiens Paradise Dark Lavender (Kientzler)

Talk about staying power: Paradise New Guineas have been around longer than just about anything you'll see at Trials, and it's good to see they're still breeding on this series. Andreas Kientzler told us that between Paradise and

Pure Beauty (the more vigorous series), they've got at least 50 colors.

New Guinea Impatiens Wild Romance Red (Dümmen Orange)

Red joins White and Blush Pink in this semi-double-flowered series that debuted last year. The best thing about the Red addition is it adds a bold color to a combo planter of the three.

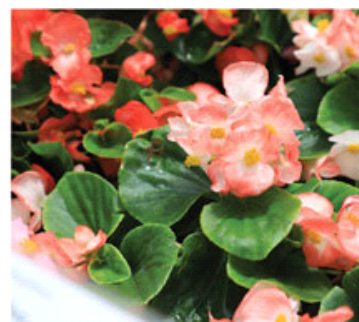
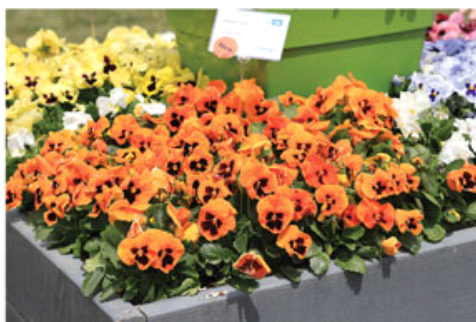
SunPatiens Vigorous Red, Rose Pink, Orchid; Compact Pink Candy (Sakata)

SunPatiens Vigorous get three color additions, while SunPatiens Compact gets one—which, by the way, is the first bicolor in the SunPatiens line.

Also in SunPatiens news, Sakata has dropped the "Spreading" sub-series moniker, rolling most of them into Vigorous. Why? Because every customer seems to have their own definition of what "spreading" means.

Canna South Pacific Orange, Rose, Ivory (Takii)

These three join Scarlet, which was introduced five years ago (it was an AAS winner in 2013, new Orange is a 2018 winner). As a reminder, South Pacific are F1 seed cannas, meaning dependable production and little risk of the diseases inherent in vegetative cannas.



Zinnia Profusion Lemon, AAS Mix (Sakata)

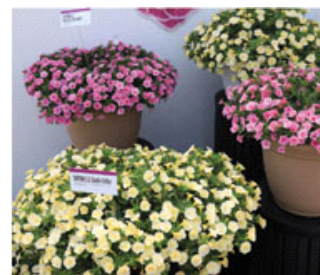
The Profusion series has more AAS winners than probably any other single series (seven, at our count, including doubles). To celebrate, Sakata has created the Profusion AAS Mix, which combines Profusion single AAS Winners White, Cherry, Orange and Red.

Pansy Inspire DeluXXe Pink Surprise Blotch, Inspire Plus Pink Shades, Orange Blotch (Benary)

The Inspire DeluXXe pansy (extra-large flowers) gets a new Pink Surprise Blotch, while the Inspire Plus Pansy series (large flowers) gets two new ones—Pink Shades and Orange Blotch. They're thinking (and we are, too) that Orange Blotch may be the only orange pansy with a face on the market (as always, correct us if we're wrong).

Begonia Sprint Plus Orange Bicolor, Lipstick (Benary)

The all-green-leaf, burly and uniform fibrous begonia adds two colors, Lipstick and Orange Bicolor, the latter of which they believe is the first of its kind.



Viola Admire Neon Purple Wing, Lavender Pink Face, Deep Purple Face, Lemon Purple Wing (Benary)

For violas, the Admire series gets four beauties. We saw them a day after a heavy rainstorm and they were smiling up at us, nonplussed about the whole thing.

Begonia Funky White, Orange (Benary)

Funky begonias combine the ease of *B. boliviensis* and the flower power of tuberous.

Calibrachoa Superbells Holy Smokes, Holy Cow (Proven Winners)

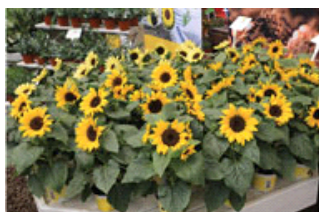
We're not kidding—those are the names! Holy is the subseries of Superbells Calibrachoa that feature star patterns with speckles or splatters. Holy Smokes is purple, Holy Cow is pink.

Calibrachoa Superbells Doublette Love Swept (Proven Winners)

This double-flowered calibrachoa kinda/sorta looks like a dianthus, doesn't it, with its compact habit and white flower edge? And when we say compact, we mean it's more compact than even the other new Superbells double introduced this year, Double Chiffon.

These crops seemed to get more attention from breeders this year.

The Year of the ... Sunflower



Sunsation (Evanthia)

First-time Trials exhibitor Evanthia ("nice new flower" in Greek) was founded in the Netherlands five years ago and offers a variety of foliage plants, cut flowers and potted plants, all from seed. One of them is the Sunsation series of pollen-free potted sunflowers that includes three colors. They do need some PGRs to keep them compact, but they did reveal that "Sunsation 2.0 is coming" and those new varieties will need less PGRs.

Sun Believable Brown Eyed Girl (Thompson & Morgan)

This 2-ft. tall sunflower is a vegetative item for pots and borders that they claim can produce 1,000 flowers per plant! It's heat and drought tolerant, too. We were curious why the specimen we were shown was in a Monrovia pot—turns out it's because Monrovia is the U.S. licensee for the plant. Danziger will be producing the cuttings and Express Seed has the 2019 exclusive on the crop.

SunBuzz (PanAmerican Seed)

This looks like it could be a garden plant, but it's bred to be a potted plant. An F1 hybrid that's pollenless, SunBuzz is naturally compact, requires minimal PGRs and has plenty of buds for lasting color indoors.

Smiley (Takii)

This F1 potted sunflower is fast to grow with a good habit, loads of side buds and no need to pinch.

The Year of the ... Salvia



Big Blue (PanAmerican Seed)

The first interspecific salvia from seed (*longispicata* x *farinacea*), it's called "big" for a reason. Ideal for 1 to 2-gal. containers, this plant is so vigorous, you only need one plug per gallon pot. Heat- and drought-tolerant, Big Blue makes for a great background plant in the landscape, blooming all the way until frost. Pollinators will love it!

Blue By You (Darwin Perennials)

Bred by Star Roses and Plants, this interspecific salvia is the first one in the garden to bloom and continues to rebloom all through the season. Zones 4b to 9.

Skyscraper (Selecta One)

This annual salvia has dark stems with tall flower spikes in three colors (Orange, Pink, Dark Purple) and excellent garden performance. It's vigorous and tall, so consider it a back-of-the-border plant. Habit is similar to Black & Blue.

Rockin' Fuchsia (Proven Winners)

The good people at Proven Winners said that this new variety is a breeding breakthrough because it's the first pink *Salvia guarnitica* type. Great branching and more compact to make it easier for growers to ship and retailers to keep it looking good on the shelf. Heat tolerant, and pollinators love it.



Cathedral Blue Bicolor (Green Fuse Botanicals)

Salvia farinacea are bulletproof in the landscape—drought-tolerant, heat-tolerant and pest-free. This one has nice two-tone flowers, is early to flower and can be grown anywhere, from Maine to Florida to California.

Mirage Salmon, White (Darwin Perennials)

The *Salvia greggii* series is fast to grow and has two new colors. A tender perennial—Zones 7 to 9.

Amanta, Kisses & Wishes (Jaldety)

A sister to Amistad, Amanta has red flowers with black bracts. Kisses & Wishes features multiple flower colors on one plant.

Ignition Fuchsia, White (PlantHaven)

Part of the Vibe collection, these two new *S. x jamesensis* types feature rich jewel-tone colors. And they're tough—they have tall spikes, but they don't break or shatter during shipping.

The Year of...Reorganizing/renaming/upgrading existing series ...



Calibrachoa Noa/Lia Series (Danziger)

Danziger is doing what several other breeders are doing: simplifying their product lines. Take Noa Calibrachoa, for instance—lots of confusing subseries. They're going to eventually drop Noa as a series and instead upgrade everything and give them their own series name based on habit. Lia, for instance. Lia is their hanging basket series. It features tight internodes and lots of flowers. Daylength is just 10 hours, so it's easy to flower early. Lia starts with four colors

Impatiens SunStanding Helios, Apollo (Dümmen Orange)

SunStanding is now broken into two subseries based on habit: Helios for the more compact varieties and Apollo for the more vigorous ones. There's also a new color—Flame Orange—and a new Florida Mix.

Calibrachoa Uno & Neo Series (Selecta One)

Selecta One used to have six series and subseries of calibrachoa. Confusing, even for their own staff, they admitted! So they've boiled them down to two series: Uno, their early flowering, compact calibrachoa; and Neo, their more traditional hanging basket types. Uno offers 19 varieties, including doubles, bicolors and stars; Neo has 22 colors. There are some new additions, too, including Uno Orange, Red, White and Double PinkTastic.

Begonia Dreams (Beekenkamp)

This series is now classified into four different categories: indoor, waterfall, garden and perfume. There were three new ones—Chocolate Orange and Solenia Scarlet in the garden category and Fragrant Falls Orange in perfume.

Begonia Senator iQ Series (Sakata)

One of the original *Begonia sempervirens* series for Sakata, dark-leafed Senator has been around a while. Now the entire series has been upgraded for better uniformity, germination/useable plugs, darker leaves and bigger flowers. The iQ name means ... well, you get to decide. Six different colors. **GT**