



TOURING • THE *trials*

THE CALIFORNIA SPRING TRIALS SHOWED OFF NEW VARIETIES AND PLANT TRENDS.

BY JAMIE J. GOOCH

FROM GILROY TO ENCINITAS, and all the stops in between, the new and yet-to-be-released cultivars were on display for a week in April during the 2010 California Spring Trials. Growers, retailers and landscapers who want to know what's new and what's next attend the annual event. This year's displays didn't disappoint.

In what is perhaps a sign of an improving economy, visitor traffic reports were up this year, compared to last year's trials, despite the timing of the 2010 event.

"We were all very surprised by the turnout, especially since the event was extra late this year (due to how Easter fell on the calendar) and most growers were deeply involved in spring crops already," says Dean Bemis, broker account manager for Syngenta Flowers.

Expanding color ranges

"There was, as always, a plethora of color on display," says Steve Carver of the trials. Carver is manager, Technical Education at OFA — An Association of Floriculture Professionals. He and his OFA companions made 13 stops along the trial trail this year. "Everyone is trying to push the border on the color range of their product lines. This year, the stand-out for me was the black petunia."

"The Ball FloraPlant Black Velvet Petunia — the world's only black petunia — certainly wowed at this year's trials," says Jennifer Neujahr, product marketing manager for PanAmerican Seed, a Ball Horticultural brand. "Black is the perfect complement to other colors and can create drama in the landscape and in mixed containers."

That drama stems from the contrast between light and dark, which was a popular theme in this year's displays.

"Contrasting colors seemed to make a bigger impression this year: blue set off by orange, red set off by green or yellow," says Bemis. "Using contrasting colors of any kind was of great interest. It's an economical way to

A rainbow of colors greeted visitors to Goldsmith Seeds/Syngenta Flowers' trials in Gilroy, CA.

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make a big impact as fewer plants can be used but they 'pop' and are very striking."

What landscapers learned

In addition to seeing new varieties, landscapers who attended this year's trials were able to see what the industry is doing to promote sustainability, pick up marketing ideas, and learn how to better maintain the plants they install for clients.

"What's exciting about Spring Trials is the inspiration it provides to all attendees," says Faith Savage, retail account manager for Syngenta Flowers. "That certainly holds true for landscapers and the growers who serve them. At Spring Trials, it's our mission to create landscape displays that inspire and motivate."

In addition to inspiration, landscapers at the trials were able to determine what new plants they should order this year for maximum impact.

"The landscape market segment wanted to see cultivars that were not necessarily the least expensive on a

per plant basis, but that could fill in a big space so the number of plants per bed was reduced," says Bemis. "TigerEye rudbeckia, Volumnia begonia, and Xtreme impatiens would be good examples from our seed assortment. Believe it or not, the Picobella milliflora petunia is very spreading and thus falls into this category."

Carver says landscapers should attend the trials to get the big picture of the plant options that are available.

"Landscape design and maintenance is based on sound science, but it is art that composes its heart and soul," he says. "If an artist would not attempt to paint a portrait or a landscape mural without a full pallet of color at his disposal,

For more information on the 2010 trials, including complete interviews and dozens of pictures, visit www.landscapemanagement.net/livescapes/.



Black was the new black at Ball Horticultural Company's trials in Santa Paula, CA.

why would a landscape professional attempt to 'paint' or maintain a living landscape without at least knowing the pallet options at their disposal? The California Spring Trials provides landscaping professionals with the ideas and materials to keep properties they design and manage fresh, fashionable ... and profitable." 🌿

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