

# Spring Trials: Behind the Trends

By Jasmina Radjevic  
and Tim Hodson

The 2010 California Springs Trials definitely experienced a bit of a makeover this year. The most obvious change was the annual event's name. Over the years, the event — which used to be known as the Pack Trials — has really evolved into a multi-faceted affair. The Spring Trials now brings together breeding, marketing, plant packaging, new technology, merchandising and more.

Some of this year's big trends included how growers and retailers can take advantage of advancements in mobile phone technology, merchandising with the end consumer in mind, edibles and extending the gardening season.



Ball Horticultural Co.



John Henry

## Edible Gardens

Edibles have been growing in popularity for a few years now, as more consumers became familiar with sustainability and ways to live an eco-friendly lifestyle. And now vegetable and herb gardens continue to be a major trend in gardening. Many companies, including Floranova, Hishtil Nursery, Ball and Plug Connection are adding more edibles to their product offering. And they're focusing greatly on how to package and merchandise these products as well as get their message out to the consumer.

Burpee Home Gardens had an impressive display of "ready-to-go gardens." They included large containers that had three different salad items planted in them, making it easier for the consumer to whip up a

salad on the go. Floranova continues to add products to its Vegetalis line. And they displayed how their tomatoes can even be used in mixed containers with flower varieties.

John Henry announced this year that the company is partnering with allrecipes.com and creating packaging for its line of edibles. At the Proven Winners location, Four Star Greenhouse also debuted its Tasty Treats collection. This new collection includes selections of their best-performing edible varieties as well as tasty combination recipes. We also got to sample some delicious strawberries at the Speedling stop, where ABZ Strawberries displayed its grand strawberry baskets.



Floranova



ABZ



Proven Winners  
— Four Star

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Proven Winners



Hort Couture

### Keeping Up With Technology

Mobile phone applications are everywhere, and our industry is definitely keeping up with all the new technology. At the Speedling location, we were introduced to all the new offerings to MasterTag's product lineup. One interesting new innovation includes displaying a phone number for garden center customers to call to find out more information on the featured product on the bench. Hort Couture is another company that is taking advantage of the smart phone

trend. They are displaying digital codes on some of their tags, so smart phone users can use "Quick Response" code technology to learn more about the product just by snapping a photo of the tag.

Proven Winners continues to reach out to new and younger gardeners using different types of technology also. Marshall Dirks showed us how they are using smart phones apps like Garden Pilot or heat mapping to see how consumers view Proven Winners' ads.

Syngenta is one of the companies that is undergoing some extreme fine tuning in regards to its technical staff. With the joining of the Goldsmith, Yoder and Goldfish brands along with Syngenta Flowers, it made sense to concentrate efforts on the technical side. With the addition of the Tech Service group (made up of all of the Syngenta companies) Syngenta will be able to address customers' issues and concerns efficiently and accurately.

We also got to see many of the new innovative things going on in breeding. PanAmerican Seed introduced its new multipelleted seed program, Fuseables. This new product is designed to create a more natural-looking mix of plants that already complement one another.



MasterTag

### Merchandising to the Consumer

As more and more plant suppliers continue to focus their efforts on the end consumer's preferences, the California Spring Trials have become a merchandiser's dream. Many of the breeders create extraordinary displays to give growers and retailers plenty of creative ideas on how they can merchandise their products. After all, that's what makes all the difference at retail. If choosing between two identical plants, the consumer is most likely going to choose the one that pops and makes an impression with its packaging.

At Suntory's trial, we learned that going forward they want garden performance and the consumer's success to be their main priorities. The genetics in their new "bouquet" program are designed to help deliver these characteristics to growers and consumers alike.

Fides North America had a wonderful display selection this year. Each vignette focused on a different season. Of course, spring is our number one selling season, but growers and retailers definitely need to



Fides

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continue merchandising products for year-round sales. By creating eye-catching displays and packaging, the consumer will take notice.

We were very impressed with the merchandising efforts at Golden State Bulb Growers. Calla lilies are absolutely gorgeous on their



Ecke Ranch



Syngenta Flowers



Golden State Bulb Growers

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own, even without attractive packaging. But now their efforts were concentrated on extending calla lilies' season. They're not necessarily just for Easter and Mother's Day. The folks at Golden State Bulb Growers showed how their products can be displayed for any season, even Christmas!

Jiffy Products introduced its new "Plant in a Jiffy" program. These handy plant packs were definitely created with the consumer in mind. They're easy to plant, are compostable and leave no waste behind.

Ecke Ranch recently partnered with Polar Bears International in an effort to promote its 'Polar Bear' poinsettia and spread the word for a good cause. The merchandising of this new variety is quite impressive, and the emotion attached to the cause is a great way to gain customers' attention.

Faith Savage of Syngenta Flowers continues to create statement-making displays using color as the central theme. At Spring Trials, she created vignettes using flowers and other gift items, each vignette centered around a separate color theme. She used items like shoes, grills, picture frames, containers, etc.

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Plant Haven



Syngenta Flowers

## True Trials

It is always refreshing to attend the California Spring Trials and actually observe true comparison trials. Each year, Pacific Plug & Liner displays one or two different types of species in its trials. This year, they were lavender and ipomoea. However, more and more breeders and brokers are joining Pacific Plug & Liner in the true trial trend. PlantHaven included a dianthus trial at its trial location. Plug Connection also had several comparisons on display.

Along with comparison trials, we enjoy viewing the experimental varieties that the companies also display at some of the locations. It gives us a sneak peek into future breeding, and it's nice to give our feedback as to what we like and which varieties we think will be successful. PlantHaven had visitors vote for which new colocasia variety we'd like to see added to their lineup. Also, at Syngenta's trial location, we were asked to vote for our favorite experimental Kwik Kombo baskets. It'll be interesting to see which combinations will be added next year.



Pacific Plug & Liner

OFA booth # 2708



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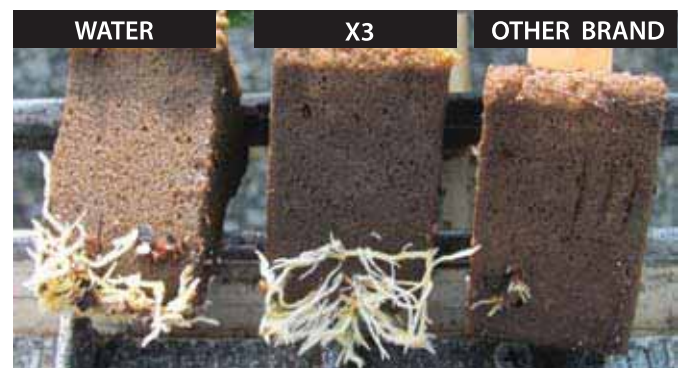
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Dümmen

Combinations

Mixed combinations also continue to be a huge hit with gardeners. Companies like Dümmen, Selecta First Class and Syngenta Flowers have introduced programs to satisfy this trend. New combinations have been added to the Confetti Garden, TrixiLiner and Kwik Kombos programs, and the baskets each company had on display definitely made heads turn.

GPN



Selecta First Class

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Jasmina Radjevic is associate editor and Tim Hodson is editorial director of GPN. They can be reached at [jradjevic@sgcmail.com](mailto:jradjevic@sgcmail.com) and [thodson@sgcmail.com](mailto:thodson@sgcmail.com) respectively.

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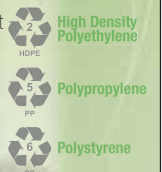
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