

Pick of the Pack Trials, part II

Three editors, seven days, 28 companies — the best of the best in new seed varieties from the 2003 California Pack Trials.

By Carrie Burns, Catherine Evans and Bridget White

You saw the best of the best in vegetative varieties in the June issue of *GPN*. Now it's time to see the best of the best in seed varieties. The seed varieties tell a different story than vegetative as to what was introduced. This year, there were quite a few new genetics and outstanding crops introduced for the seed market.

The seed market has always been a cost-effective propagation choice for growers. But with the advent of vegetatively propagated varieties, growers have indicated an interest in other things than pure cost. Unique genetics and premium crops take the day now, and seed breeders are now offering lines that more than fill the bill. The seed market's advancements, showcased in this year's Pack Trials, have brought unique traits and improvements to seed varieties that are frequently found in vegetative varieties. Now we are graced with unique crops such as seed hibiscus and double aquilegia. So, without delay, check out these and other innovative seed varieties we saw as we traveled the coast. Enjoy!



AQUILEGIA

Kieft Seeds has brought out a new, very exciting double aquilegia that is a major breakthrough for the species. 'Winky Double Red-White' has an abundance of upright facing, double flowers with long spurs and a garden height of 12-14 inches. The petals are a bright white color with a pinkish-red spreading up from the spurs that is punctuated by bright yellow centers.

This hardy perennial has a sow to flower time of approximately 10-11 months and is best in 4- to 6-inch containers. Sowing time is June and July, and seeds should be kept at 50° F for two weeks and 73° F for three weeks. Plants should be grown in well-drained soil with lightly fertilized compost. Optimum growing temperature for Winky varieties is 57-64° F. Other colors are Blue-



Clockwise from top left: Aquilegia 'Winky Double Red-White' (Kieft Seeds); Calla lily HIPP 'Garnet Glow' (Golden State); Celosia 'Fresh Look Red' (Benary).

variety information

White, Red-White, Purple-White, Rose-Rose and a formula mix, all single-flowered. Double Red-White is good for landscape and small or large containers.

CALLA LILY

We all love calla lilies, but those old, vigorous varieties make for difficult potted plant sales and have been a major hurdle in breaking open this crop for Valentine's Day, Easter and Mother's Day sales. The HIPP program from Golden State Bulb Company looks to change your perception about callas.

HIPP, which stands for High Input Proprietary Product, is a patented method for producing calla tubers that turns the most vigorous variety into a compact 4½-inch product with an exceptionally high bud count. Currently available in seven colors — 'Albo Maculata', 'Crystal Blush', Pink (*rehmannii*), 'Lavender Gem', 'Garnet Glow', 'Sunshine' and 'Golden Chalice' — HIPP tubers, which if you're wondering why they are covered here are seed propagated, require less growth regulator and produce more plant in 4-inch and smaller production. The smaller, more numerous flowers make this a great impulse buy at retail.

HIPP production is similar to regular calla production in that cool temperatures and bright light produce the best plants. The major differences are those stemming from producing a less vigorous plant in a small format.

CELOSIA

By now you've probably heard all about the Fresh Look series from Benary. We featured it in the annual "Winner's Circle" in the May 2003 issue of *GPN*. 'Fresh Look Red' won the Fleuroselect and the AAS Gold Medal for its outstanding pack and garden performance, closely followed by 'Fresh Look Yellow', which was given the Fleuroselect Quality Mark and the AAS Winner award. So, it's no surprise that the series was one of our favorites at the trials. What is surprising is its garden performance in all climates. Fresh Look

is heat tolerant and very vigorous with good basal and lateral branching. With a height of 14 inches, these winners produce an abundance of long-lived, plume-like flowers. Fresh Look's high germination rate will reduce production costs, and its well-branched habit increases flower presentation.

CINERARIA

This was a pretty easy choice since Venezia cineraria from S&G Flowers is the first and only F1 hybrid cineraria on the market. But that's not the only reason we picked it; although cineraria is typically a cool-season crop, Venezia will flower under warmer temperatures than other cineraria. Its early

flowering time — up to 10 days earlier than other cineraria varieties — very compact habit and medium-sized leaves suitable for 5-inch pots made the decision for us.

Venezia varieties require no vernalization. Flower stems are short, and the flowers sit on top of the foliage. Eight colors make up the Venezia line: Blue, Blue with Ring, ◆



Left to right: *Cineraria* 'Venezia Bordeaux' (S&G Flowers); *Cyclamen* 'Robusta Rose' (Goldsmith Seeds); *Delphinium* 'Guardian Blue' (PanAmerican).

Future Fields

With two full years under their proverbial belt, The Flower Fields is quickly disproving the skeptics that said the alliance would never work. Remember the rumors? Four independent, family-owned companies operated by four strong personalities will never come to a consensus on anything. Everybody got a good laugh out of that, not the least of which were Paul Ecke III, Joel Goldsmith, Gary Faulkenstein, Karl Trellinger and Tom Doak when we sat down together at this year's Pack Trials to talk about the future of The Flower Fields.

"It is interesting," admitted Ecke, president of Ecke Ranch, "because we all compete. Our philosophy has been simply to take more total market share without worrying about which individual company is the beneficiary, and it has worked."

Attributing their success to innovative marketing alliances with companies such as Federal Express and P. Allen Smith Gardens, a wide range of genetics and flexibility in adopting their marketing programs, the partners vowed to remain four individual companies marketed as one. It seems that for now, the rumor of one company with one product line is just that. "We keep each other in check," explained Fisher's Faulkenstein.

So if the rumor about merging into one company or the one about starting their own broker company (did I forget to mention that we had a good laugh about that one as well?) are false, what is in this company's future? New initiatives include an E-commerce Internet portal where brokers can order and growers can view products from all four companies in real time, possible sharing of germplasm, continued marketing of the brand and anything else this eclectic group can come up with.

"We started three years ago with a good idea," explains Yoder president Doak; "this year, we put some meat on those ideas; and we're just getting started." — *Bridget White*



Left to right: Joel Goldsmith, Bridget White, Paul Ecke III, Karl Trellinger, Gary Faulkenstein and Tom Doak.

variety information

Bordeaux, Carmine with Ring, Cherry, Lavender and Pink with Ring, plus the only pure white on the market and a formula mix.

CYCLAMEN

The new Robusta cyclamen series from Goldsmith Seeds is certainly up to par with its name. This is one of the largest cyclamen on the market. It fills out a 6- to 7½-inch pot to create a very nice florist cyclamen. The large flowers

accompany equally large foliage that makes the plant even more eye-catching.

The product comes in raw seed and has a finishing time of 20-24 weeks from transplant. Robusta is ideal for middle and late season markets, as it is two weeks later than the Sierra series, Goldsmith's standard cyclamen. Robusta is hardy in zone 10 and likes partial to filtered sun. The series has seven colors and a for-

mula mix, including White, Salmon, Purple, Fuchsia, Wine, Rose and Scarlet.

DELPHINUM

Delphinium's height has always meant expensive staking or green sales, but PanAmerican Seed's new Guardian series offers growers an economic opportunity to showcase one of the most popular perennials while it's in color. With heavy PGR application (for the tri-

als, Bonzi at 20 ppm applied four times was used) Guardian varieties can be produced for 6-inch container sales and programmed to flower at a desired finish/harvest period for an extended marketing window. Guardian varieties (Early Blue, White, Blue, Lavender and a mix) are great multi-use plants that are perfect for landscape/bedding applications, commercial cutflower production and flowering potted sales. ▶



Left to right: Double Dianthus 'Dynasty Red' (PanAmerican); Gerbera 'Jaguar Orange' (S&G Flowers); Gerbera 'Royal Salmon Rose' (The Flower Fields).

variety information



Bridget's Favorites

Aquilegia 'Winky Double-Red-White' (Kieft Seeds)
Calla lily HIPP Program (Golden State)
Gerbera Royal series (The Flower Fields)
Marigold 'Disco Red' (Bodger Seeds)
Nicotiana 'Tinkerbell' (Floranova)

Guardian varieties can be treated it like an F1 hybrid lisianthus or snapdragon and are suitable for greenhouse, tunnel or field production. The series is approximately six weeks earlier to flower from transplant than open pollinated varieties, with Early Blue flowering approximately one week prior to Blue and finishing 10 percent shorter. Autumn greenhouse production takes 13 weeks to finish; autumn field production, 16 weeks; spring greenhouse production, 11 weeks; and spring field production, 13 weeks. Plants have mild ethylene sensitivity and should be treated with an ethylene inhibitor prior to shipment.



DIANTHUS

Common in vegetatively propagated dianthus, a fully double, F1, seed propagated dianthus has until now eluded breeders, but PanAmerican Seed's new Dynasty series offers a unique double flower in three colors: Purple, Red and White Blush. Very well branched, with upright, strong stems, the Dynasty series does triple duty as a bedding plant, backyard cut flower and novelty potted plant.



Timing on the Dynasty series is similar to other PanAmerican dianthus but can be up to one week later in warmer climates. Lightly scented flowers appear 6-8 weeks after transplant in jumbo packs, and depending on final usage, this series is suitable for production in everything from jumbo packs to 1-gallon containers. Temperature requirements are 60-72° F days and low 50s to 60° F nights, depending on stage.



GERBERA

We all know gerberas are a popular flower for both bedding and cut flower production. So

Top to bottom: Gypsophilia 'Gypsy Deep Rose' (Dæhnfeldt); 'Hibiscus 'Luna Red' (PanAmerican Seed); Heuchera 'Ruby Bells' (Benary).

variety information

any alteration made to a gerbera could be a money-maker. The Jaguar Junior series from S&G Flowers offers that differentiation with its small leaves and short petioles. Perfect for 3½- to 4-inch pots, each Jaguar Junior plant produces 4-8 1½- to 2½-inch flowers. Seven colors have been introduced: Orange, Red, Salmon Shades, White, Yellow, Dark Center Mix and Formula Mix.

The faster crop time (85-90 days to first flower) than regular-size gerberas make this an ideal product for mass merchant sales. Jaguar varieties will work either by themselves or in combinations.

GERBERA

Royal is a new gerbera series that is bred by Global Flowers and is being marketed in the United States. by The Flower Fields. The series is very early flowering and produces many flowers while maintaining a good flower size.

The plants are medium sized with a nice dark green foliage and a habit that allows for the development of many buds. This new series has large colorful flowers that come in nine colors as well as a mixture including: White, Deep

Rose, Salmon Rose, Scarlet, Yellow, Golden Yellow, Light Orange, Golden-Orange-Scarlet Shades, and White and Soft Pink Shades.

Royal is very uniform and works best in 4- to 6-inch pots. When finishing in a larger container, skip the growth regulators and increase fertility. The pH levels for this series are very important, gerberas favor a lower pH (5.0-5.5) to prevent iron and manganese deficiency. Temperatures should be maintained at 64-72° F because

Carrie's Favorites

Aquilegia 'Winky Double-Red-White' (Kieft Seeds)

Delphinium Guardian series (Pan American Seed)

Gerbera Royal series (The Flower Fields)

African impatiens 'Jungle Gold' (PanAmerican Seed)

Schizanthus TreasureTrove series (S&G Flowers).

A good cool season alternative that will provide lots of color. This is the only series with a lot of breeding behind it.



Left: *Impatiens* 'Jungle Gold' (PanAmerican Seed); *Lisianthus* 'Cinderella Yellow' (Goldsmith Seeds).

variety information

night temperatures that drop below 60° F will delay the plants. Additional lighting can be very beneficial to gerberas in the beginning, but during spring and summer natural lighting will be fine.

GYPOSPHILIA

'Gypsy Deep Rose' blooms with rose colored, semi-double to fully double flowers. This new variety from Dæhnfeldt has a mounding habit that almost looks like a ball. The finely textured foliage and small double flower work well as a border, in hanging baskets and 4-inch containers. It is also an AAS winner.

Gypsy needs slightly fertilized peat with a pH of 5.5-6.0 for sowing and a pH of 5.5-6.5 for growing on. It should be sown directly into packs or plug trays with 10-20 seeds or 1-2 multipellets per hole. The seeds need light to germinate and have a germination

time of four days. After germination, lower growing temperatures to 58-60° F. Gypsy Deep Rose shows visible buds 8-9 weeks after sowing and are ready for spring sales at 12-14 weeks after sowing. The first flowers of the plant may come out as single

flowers, but as light levels increase, the fully double flowers will appear.

HIBISCUS

Finally, a seed hibiscus with good garden performance and exceptional branching. ▶



Left: Lobelia 'Aqua White' (American Takii); Right: Marigold 'Disco Red' (Bodger Seed).

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variety information

Catherine's Favorites

Aquilegia 'Winky Double-Red-White' (Kieft Seeds)

Gerbera Royal series (The Flower Fields)

Gerbera Jaguar series (S&G Flowers)

Mimulus 'Magic Yellow Flame'

Viola Gem series' new Antique colors have a very different bicolor pattern than most plants on the market, making them something new to put in the garden that will stand out. (American Takii)



Because it does not need pinching to create a big, bushy plant, Pan American Seed's new Luna series is a low cost, high-impact crop that works equally well for annual, perennial and nursery growers. Boasting 6- to 8-inch flowers, this series is a great late season crop.

Both colors in the Luna series, Blush and Red, prefer warm growing conditions, with minimum average temperatures of 68° F, and will even become chlorotic in lower temperatures. Luna varieties are drought tolerant, perfect for 1-quart to 1-gal. production and finish in 13-14 weeks from seed in summer and 16 weeks in spring. Luna is a long-day plant, requiring a minimum of 14 hours of low-intensity daylight and 12 hours of high intensity daylight to flower.

HUCHERA

'Ruby Bells' heuchera from Benary throws a high number of delicate, bell-shaped flowers that are held above the foliage. But, the

clinker here is the deep red flower color, which is unique for a heuchera. The color is deeper than most, which will make it stand out from other red varieties in retail.

Ruby Bells can grow up to 16 inches and has more flower stems after vernalization than other heucheras. Its natural flowering time is May through August. End uses range from perennial beds to container complements or as a ground cover.

IMPATIENS

Several companies featured novelty *Impatiens auricoma* at this year's trials, but PanAmerican Seed's really made a showing with its golden flowers that are held above dark green, glossy foliage. The impatiens genus might not seem very sexy, but 'Jungle Gold' adds the much-desired yellow hue to gardener's shade palettes, with its intricate, orchid-like flowers that, unlike other *Impatiens auricoma* we've seen, are highly visible above the foliage.



Left: *Mimulus* 'Magic White Flame' (Floranova); Right: *Nicotiana* 'Tinkerbelle' (Floranova).



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variety information

Jungle Gold is very vigorous and free flowering, prefers dry conditions and works best in 4½-, 6- or 8-inch production. Handle this plant like a New Guinea and space before foliage reaches the sides of the pot. A few production suggestions to keep in mind: apply PGRs at transplanting and before flower buds appear to keep flowers above foliage; high light reduces flowering, especially under high temperatures; and too much water results in large leaves that hide the flowers. Transplant to flower takes 8-10 weeks, depending on container size.

LISIANTHUS

'Cinderella Yellow' is a new and exciting color for a lisianthus. Part of a new series from Goldsmith Seeds, Cinderella Yellow will produce a full bouquet of true yellow flowers with frilly edges on long, thick and straight stems with minimal branching low to the plant. The trailing habit allows for easy harvest and removal of stems through the stem supports for a nicer looking cut flower. The smaller leaves on the lower portion allow for good airflow through beds, minimalizing disease problems during production.

Cinderella displays its blooms in a tight cluster at the tops of the

stems. The cluster is contained within a hand-spread, which is a desirable trait for florists looking for an easy lisianthus to work with. This variety is to be used in Group II sowing and is also suitable for early season Group III. The usual crop time for Cinderella Yellow is 22-26 weeks. Other colors in the series are Ivory and Pink

LOBELIA

With its pure white color, Takii's new lobelia 'Aqua White' takes a big step forward in color; this is the white lobelia you have been looking for. Flowers are the purest white we've ever seen, without a yellow center or other heat-triggered coloring. As the popularity of lobelia as a component plant has been growing, the availability of a pure white should have great potential.

Perfect for pack production, the Aqua series features a mounding habit that makes an attractive potted plant in 4- or 6-inch containers. Other varieties in the Aqua series — Blue with Eye, Sky Blue, Violet and Lavender — bloom two weeks earlier than the standard lobelia, though the new White is a bit later. This plant requires cool temperatures for best flowering, and under 60-70° F days and 45-55° F nights will flower 60-75 days after sowing. For best results, sow 4-7 seeds per cell in plug trays and transplant as one clump.

MARIGOLD

Looking for a sophisticated, bright red, quality marigold — this is it. Disco Red from Bodger Seeds is not your typical marigold in terms of appearance. It is not crested and has more of a cosmos shape to its single-petaled flowers. Disco Red holds its color even in the brightest sunshine. This unique color will add something new to this commodity crop that will stand out in retail. ♦



Top: 'Ultima Apricot Shades' (Sakata); Bottom: Phlox 'Ethnie Dark Rose' (Kieft).

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variety information

Marigolds are one of the easier crops to produce, and Disco Red will fit well with standard marigold production. Garden height reaches 8-10 inches, and the bright red color is apparent on the large single flowers.

MIMULUS

Mimulus Magic from Floranova has three unique new bicolors to add to their series. 'Magic Yellow Bloch', 'Magic White Flame' and 'Magic Yellow Flame' are all bursting with colorful patterns. Magic Yellow Bloch has a yellow base color with a splash of red blotches all over the petals. Magic White Flame is a white color covered with dark pink dots that take over the petal

for a nice color contrast. Magic Yellow Flame also has a yellow petal that is covered in red dots with a little of the yellow peeking through each one.

These bicolors are very uniform throughout the series, with each plant carrying an abundance of flowers. The plants grow approximately 10 inches high with flowers that are 1 1/2 inches in size. There is a very short production time in long days for Magic, with flowering 6-7 weeks after sowing. The plants are frost resistant and can flower again in the spring. Flowering time is spring to late summer. Magic should be sown in late winter to spring under glass with a germination temperature of 59-68° F and growing at 41-50° F. There are 12 other colors included in the Magic series: Red, White with Blotch, Orange, Bicolor, Ivory Bicolor, Peach, Pastel Pink Shades, Yellow, Wine, Crimson, Ivory and Pastel Yellow Improved.

NICOTIANA

This large nicotiana from Floranova is a great new addition to the nicotiana family but with a new added surprise. 'Tinkerbelle'

is a very vigorous, large hybrid, which is not common in other nicotiana varieties. Flowers are rose with green reverse and blue pollen, making this a very unique high-end color. In order to get darker colors, Tinkerbelle needs cooler temperatures. It has a widely branched habit and is very self-supporting. While Tinkerbelle can be produced in 4-inch pots, it is best in larger con-



Top to bottom: *Salvia 'Sizzler Burgundy Stripe'* (Floranova); *Bottom: Trachelium 'Jemmy Deep Violet'* (Benary).

tainers for mass plantings. Tinkerbelle received a Fleuroselect Quality Mark in 2003.

Tinkerbelle flowers through the summer and has good disease and weather tolerance. Approximately 1-inch flowers are supported on 36-inch stems. This plant should be sown from winter to early spring under glass at 64-75° F. Plants should be hardened off and planted out after the danger of frost has passed. ♦

variety information

PANSY

This new variety from Sakata is a great eye-catching color for the fall season, especially around Halloween. 'Ultima Apricot Shades' features shades ranging from bronze apricot to

pale salmon orange. Medium sized flowers appear early on highly floriferous plants with a compact habit. Other colors in the Ultima series: Lavender Shades, Scarlet and Yellow, Pink Shades, Salmon Yellow (also

new), 'Ultima Mix' and 'Ultima Silhouette Mix'.

Standard pansy production applies to both new colors. Ultima should be fed generously and kept away from PGRs to achieve a great spring or fall plant.

PHLOX

The Ethnie series of phlox from Kieft seeds has two new colors to add. 'Ethnie Burgundy' and 'Ethnie Dark Rose' are part of the genetically compact series that has no need for PGRs. Burgundy has dark flowers with small dark burgundy veins around the yellow center, while Dark Rose is a bright pink flower on top and a bright white flower bottom. These varieties are good for pot and pack production and have a very uniform habit. It has a short cultivation period, making these varieties very early.

Ethnie grows to approximately 6 inches tall with a sow to flower time of 10-12 weeks. Sowing outdoors (direct seed) should be April to May and indoors (transplanting), February to May. At temperature of 64-71° F should be maintained with only slight moisture and a germination time of 8-15 days. Growing needs to be done in any well-drained soil in a temperature of 57-64° F with normal to high fertilization requirements. Ethnie has a wide color range including Scarlet, Velvet-Red, Deep Rose Salmon, Purple-Violet, Light Blue, White, Formula Mix and Pastel Mix.

SALVIA

Floranova has three new brilliant bicolor additions to its Sizzler salvia series. 'Sizzler Burgundy Stripe', 'Sizzler Burgundy Halo' and 'Sizzler Red Strip Improved' are amazing bicolor combinations usual to salvia. Sizzler is the earliest and offers the fullest color range of pack salvia, with nine other colors in the series, Lilac Bicolor, White Improved, Orange, Pink, Red, Salmon Improved, Purple, Burgundy and Lavender, plus bicolor and standard mixes.

Sizzler's flowers are held well above the foliage, and the plant, as a whole, is very compact and well branched for extended shelf life. Sizzler is day length neutral and flowers from spring throughout summer until first frost. It grows approximately 10-12 inches with a flower size of 4 inches. The Sizzler series was bred for plug and pack performance and uses elitech quality seed for plug production. ◆

variety information

TRACHELIUM

There were several trachelium introductions this year, and we wondered if this crop was making a come back. One of the most impressive seed varieties we saw was Benary's Jemmy series. Featuring a full color range and variability in

use, this series is one for closer inspection. It can throw long, sturdy flower stems that are ideal for specialty cut flower production, or it can produce an impressive bedding variety with a compact habit and good branching. This is a new trachelium series that features four

colors: Antique Rose, Deep Violet, White and Royal Purple.

Grown closely on the bench in large pots or open beds, Jemmy produces sturdy 3- to 3½-foot long stems for cutting. And in smaller containers, compact pot plants about 12-16 inches can be pro-

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Based in Moss Landing, Calif., Golden State Bulb Company is well known for bulbs and tubers, leading the market with the development of innovative calla lily colors and habits.

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Goldsmith Seeds is a family-owned business founded in 1962. Located in Gilroy, Calif., Goldsmith breeds and markets a full line of cut flowers, potted crops, bedding plants and crops for hanging baskets. Goldsmith is a partner in The Flower Fields alliance.

KIEFT SEEDS

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Located in Venhuizen, the Netherlands, Kieft Seeds is well known for its seed quality in bedding plants and perennials. Kieft specializes in many of the minor seed crops.

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Established in 1977, Morgan Hill, Calif.-based Sakata Seed America focus on vegetable breeding and the evaluation of flowers and vegetables. Best-known for its pansies and violas, Sakata also offers a new line of seed-propagated trailing petunias and a full line of ranunculus.

duced. Jemmy is a long-day plant, requiring 16 hours of light either as extended days or through night interruption to initiate flowering. Spring and summer production turns out the highest-quality plants, though it can be produced year round. 

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