



Editor's Report

It seems like just yesterday I was writing this section for the vegetative varieties from Pack Trials. Well, it almost was (you can find that coverage in the June 2005 issue). The seed side showed just as many interesting introductions and trends, which we'll be highlighting on the next six pages. But, before you get to that I want to tell

you a little more about this year's Pack Trials.

I joked last month about some silly "Best Of" awards. While those were fun points in our Pack Trials trip, there were more serious conversations that were a bit more fruitful. When we go to Pack Trials we are looking at more than just the new introductions. Pack Trials is a good time to hear the latest news and gossip; it's a good time to run into friends or make new ones; and it's a perfect time to really get deep into the thick of things regarding anything in the industry.

After attending Pack Trials for a few consecutive years, we all found ourselves talking about some of the differences throughout the years. Here are just a few examples.

Past Years	2005
Popular Crop	
Introductioncalibrachoa, coleus.....osteospermum
Pack Trial	
Displaysgroupings of color.....outdoor home décor
Marketing	
Initiativesto consumers.....to growers
Grower	
Informationcustomer service.....culture sheets
Introduction	
Philosophynew and unique.....higher bench runs

These differences remind us that times are changing, and we as an industry need to keep up. I was just visiting a greenhouse that I had been to two years ago; they, of course have changed in that last two years — changes in automation, product offering, expansion, etc. The next greenhouse I went to has made even more changes; when one of their largest customers dropped them in favor of a larger grower, they had to do something to get the business back. They designed a mini marketing program and changed their product offering from common crops to combos in high-quality containers rather than the standard 12-inch plastic.

So, onward to change; in the next six pages, you will find the opportunity for change — first, some trends from Pack Trials that you can apply to your business, and then you'll find some of the greatest seed introductions we saw this year. It is up to you to use it to your advantage.

The Rest of the Trials

New varieties aren't the only draw to Pack Trials. Find out about the industry's latest trends and newest directions in seed crops.

By Carrie Burns, Catherine Evans and Bridget White

In last month's coverage of the vegetative varieties introduced at Pack Trials, we made the comment that after a few years it starts to get a little difficult to get excited about another shade of red geranium or an impatiens that is a quarter of an inch shorter. And if that comment is true of vegetative crops, where so much innovation takes place, it's certainly true of seed crops, where the differences between varieties is sometimes hard to see.

So for many of us the best part of Pack Trials has become identifying emerging trends in the industry. Of course, that's not saying we didn't find lots of plants to get excited about (see page 28 for some of our favorites). Just that there are other things going on at Pack Trials besides the plants, and if you are like us and you want to see what's up in the industry before you get down to the real work of selecting which new varieties to trial, then we've got all you need.

MARKETING TRENDS

Unlike the vegetative companies, the seed companies really focused on marketing this year, with some great new branded lines being introduced. The following are just a few of our favorites.

Living Décor is a new program from PanAmerican Seed that aims to turn standard seed items such as sunflowers, coleus and marigolds into impulse gift items. The idea is to sell cute, miniature plants — usually in multiples such as six celosia with small cones — in decorative containers. All crops for the program have a 21-day lifespan, even under interior low-light conditions, and make very eye-catching, unusual gifts. And in true PanAmerican style, all of the details have been worked out. Our Pack Trials book contained schedules for all the recommended crops, when to start seeds for peak selling periods, as well as culture tips for some of the crops. This information should soon be available on the Web site. Living Décor is a great program that turns commodity crops into high-value gifts. It has low input costs, could bring a high margin and had everyone at Pack Trials talking. A great idea!



Living Décor from PanAmerican Seed.



Probably the most unusual new marketing program this year was Gardening For Dummies. Yes, this is the same brand as the popular books and has been licensed by broker H.F. Michelle's for application to plants. Pots, bench tape and tags will carry the recognizable Dummy logo, and a booklet explaining how to be successful with the newly purchased plants will be given to customers at purchase. The line will include only easy-to-grow, tough plants such as seed geraniums, vincas and petunias. We were excited to see a floriculture company looking outside of our universe for ideas but remain a little skeptical about whether or not the brand will actually extend to plants. After all, the promise of the Dummy brand is that it takes a complicated subject and makes it easy; we're not sure a booklet will do that, but kudos for trying. Given the cost of the license and the target customer, this program will probably go to a box store, but the specific one had not yet been determined at Pack Trials. Michelle's did, however, say that trials were already underway at Kmart.

In terms of marketing, S&G Flowers wins the award for the most programs introduced. Having not really focused on branding in the past, S&G made up for it this year by introducing eight new brands focusing on specific uses and positioning. Some of the more interesting ones are: Bulbs & Blooms, which are upscale combo pots with bulbs and violas for spring blooms and sedum and guara for summer blooms; and Autumn Hues, combination planters that contain seed and vegetative items that tolerate cold fall temperatures.

One last note about marketing...if their displays are any indication, the seed companies really seem to understand that our industry is about more than just plants. At company after company, we saw not only display gardens but lifestyle vignettes. In fact this was one of the most consistent trends on the seed side this year. We saw everything from a cottage garden at PanAmerican Seed to a desert garden complete with snakes at Floranova. Sakata Seed America showed a typical patio with furniture and blooming containers; American Takii even went so far as to put images of people in their garden. Yes, in terms of tying it all together with hardscaping, outdoor furniture and plants, the seed companies outdid themselves.

CROP TRENDS

On the seed side, we saw the companies break out of a several-year slump and offer a wide array of interesting crops. The biggest trend we can point to this year is the absence of trends. Introductions were all over the board; we saw everything from pansies and impatiens to aquilegia and grasses and many companies that offered just two or three new varieties last year showed 10-20 this year. True, there were some two-day quicker petunias and 3-mm-shorter violas, but for the most part, this year's seed crops were real improvements.

The one popular crop this year seemed to be vinca. We've been watching more companies jumping on the vinca bandwagon, and this year might be the high point, with at least three companies introducing new crops. Floranova introduced two new series, Sun Devil Extreme and Viper, aimed at the bedding and landscape markets, respectively. S&G Flowers was showing a little improvement on last year's big hit from them: the Sunstorm series. Lastly, between its three series, PanAmerican showed nine new colors. That's a lot of vinca!

And even though it's not a trend, we couldn't discuss crop developments without covering the knock-out introductions from PanAmerican Seed. The first-ever seed introductions of angelonia, diascia and nemesia were the most interesting introductions we saw all week, especially the angelonia. These are great crops that have come to be industry staples, and when you add to that the economy of producing from seed...well, let's just say that we hope PanAmerican has lots of seed. The specific descriptions start on page 28.

ALLIANCES

In a time of shifting alliances throughout the industry, the seed companies were noticeably quiet this year. No new alliances to announce, no rumors to pass along. The only thing that even came close this year was another broker jumping onto the Pack Trials scene, with H.F. Michelle's co-habiting with GGG and Northern Innovators at Speedling. We'll be curious to see if more of the brokers throw their proverbial hats into this ring next year. GPN

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The Name Game

Unlike names in new vegetative cultivars, which often evoke an emotion or sensation, the series names for seed crops are most often descriptive. Just like seed crops themselves, their names go for a quick, direct hit. This year, not surprisingly, the three most popular references were to size, finish time and performance.

Size. When flower size is the only thing that matters, a descriptive name is a good first step...and the focus is not always on biggest, as we can see from this year's names: Microla viola from Kieft Seeds, Midori cyclamen from Goldsmith Seeds and Maximus mimulus from Floranova.

Finish time. Not as many names focused on finish time this year, but there were a few: Stopwatch portulaca from Bodger Seeds and Go-Go begonia from Goldsmith Seeds.

Performance. These names covered everything from intensity to staying power in their quest to describe the perfect performance: Encore impatiens from Bodger Seeds, Lotto begonia from Ernst Benary of America and Ideal dianthus from PanAmerican Seed.



Left: Gardening for Dummies from H.F. Michelle's. **Middle:** If you are looking for new packaging, this window box carrier from MasterTag is perfect. **Right:** Getting into the gardening lifestyle at American Takii.