

TRENDING FROM THE GOLDEN STATE

The annual California Spring Trials is certainly no longer just about plant comparisons. Merchandising, packaging and consumer trends are just as important at the multiple exhibits. Here's a snapshot of some of the concepts on display this year.

BY JASMINA DOLCE

COMBO CREATIONS

Mixed combinations are nothing new, but they continue to grow in popularity. The breeding companies continue to build on their current mixed offerings, but some are even adding novel concepts and adding non-traditional varieties to combinations.

- 1) With its recent acquisitions, Dümmen Orange has now expanded its lineup to add perennials, herbs and succulents. We loved their succulent display where they showed how kalanchoes could be added to succulent mixes for some extra color.
- 2) Westhoff announced its partnership with gerbera breeder Florist Holland to create mixes made up of traditional annuals, accented with gerber daisies. An interesting twist!
- 3) Consumers want mixed baskets that are not only attractive in spring, but they want them to last through the heat of the season. At Syngenta, we were introduced to new mixes created only with their "Heat Lovers." Here's 'Kwik Kombos Summer to Remember'.
- 4) Golden State Bulb Growers showed how calla lilies can be used as a thriller component in mixed combinations. We loved the mixtures using coleus as the filler.



CONNECTING THE DOTS

This year, breeders were making a strong effort to connect the entire supply chain — from breeder to grower to retail to consumer. Branded programs, especially those using trending themes that reflect the current market, certainly help; that way consumers recognize and demand specific products from specific companies.

Now, more than ever, consumers want to know the origins of any product they purchase. This used to pertain mostly to food, but now it's happening with clothing, home furnishings and even green goods.

To satisfy all the links of the chain, this year's displays had multiple components to show plants in production all the way to the garden, and everywhere in between.

- 1) At the Benary stop, attendees were able to view the plants as they would appear in finished production as well as in the garden. They used an art theme to reinforce plants' visual artistry.
- 2) Consumer packaging continues to be a huge focus for many of the Spring Trials exhibitors. Dümgen Orange displayed each of its branded programs to show which materials are available for each variety or collection. We love the simplicity and message behind the "For You" pots and the new SunStanding packaging.
- 3) And because the edibles category continues to be a top seller at retail, offering branded programs for fruits, veggies and herbs is marketing gold! Check out Pixie grapes from Plug Connection and the brand new Bubble Berry strawberry from Pacific Plug & Liner.
- 4) Cross marketing with products outside the green industry is becoming a trend at retail as garden centers seek new customers. Mum breeder Gediflora introduced a new product, a Belgian beer made with chrysanthemum extract. Retailers could merchandise the beer along with the plant for combo sales.



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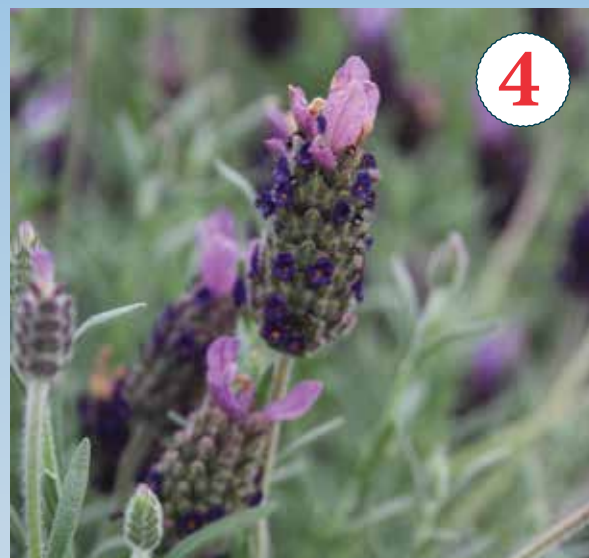
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- 5) Sakata, MasterTag and Summit showed off their team spirit with this new NFL Package made with Grandio pansies, an NFL helmet tag and team-branded container. These will make great season extenders and impulse buys at retail in the fall.
- 6) MasterTag highlighted its new Spotlight whiskey barrel pot, which can be used as a container for autumn mixes.

FRAGRANCE MATTERS

It seems like fragrance had taken a backseat to other characteristics in recent years. But judging by the number of dianthus and lavender introductions this year, scented blooms are making a strong comeback. Here are some of our favorite intros whose scent is just as delightful as their appearance.

- 1) 'Constant Beauty Garnet' is the newest addition to Green Fuse Botanical's series of large-flowered, sweetly scented dianthus. It maintains its flowering through the summer, even in warmer regions.
- 2) Lavender 'Calm Breeze' from Selecta is a French lavender not known for its flower but for its foliage, texture and culinary use. It is ultra fragrant and can be used as a scented thriller in mixed combos.
- 3) The result of eight years of breeding, Plant Haven's 'Pinball Wizard' presents masses of fancy pink and white striped flowers and blue silver foliage. It is highly scented and features repeat flowering.



- 4) Hishtil introduced a ton of delightfully scented varieties, many of which are still in the experimental stages. One of our favorites was lavender 'Fathead'. It has a spicy fragrance and, as its name suggests, large, thick flower heads.



GARDENS ARE BUZZING

Pollinator gardens are all the rage these days. Gardeners want to do their part for the environment, and for some, that means planting flowers that will attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.

- 1) The folks at Syngenta Flowers made sure attendees were aware of their pollinator-friendly efforts. They had signage and displays throughout their exhibit to educate guests on the issue.

- 2) Suntory continues to expand on its bee-loving Beedance bidens, now with new mixes that play off the Beedance name. Here is 'Bee Gorgeous'.
- 3) At Proven Winners' new Spring Trials location, we were able to see more inspiring retail displays than ever before. One display showed a bench of nothing but plants for pollinators, including salvia, angelonia and monarda.
- 4) Green Fuse Botanicals has expanded its popular line of pollinator-friendly *Salvia splendens*. Grandstand has three new eye-catching additions; Red Pink Lipstick is quite the head turner.

COMING SOON...

Occasionally, some of the California Spring Trials exhibitors will give guests a sneak peek into new breeding that is in the works. These experimental varieties haven't made the cut just yet but will usually make an official introduction in the following season. This year, more than in years past, we were able to check out a whole lot of experimentals. It was pretty exciting to see the varieties in the pipeline. Here are some of our favorites.



1) American Takii's canna Cannova series is very showy and fast to finish. 'Cannova Flame' is an experimental that has deep orange-red flowers with yellow edging.



2) 'Sweet Valentines' is an experimental tomato by Hem Genetics. Its fruits are heart shaped and would make a great Valentine's Day item at retail.



3) Thompson & Morgan had this lovely experimental cosmos on display that has delicate semi-double flowers. They start white and age to blush pink.

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TRAILING EVERYTHING

With the increasing popularity of baskets and mixed combinations, the demand for trailing varieties is growing. Many of the breeders are adding more varieties that will offer a spilling effect in containers.

- 1) The new Falling Star series by Syngenta Flowers is the first trailing pentas for extremely hot climates. Three colors are available: Pink Bicolor, Rose and White.
- 2) Royal Van Zanten introduced Skyfall, the first true hanging basket garden mum series. These mums allow consumers to continue enjoying their gardens in the fall when their spring baskets have lost their splendor.



- 3) Solar Avalanche vinca, bred by Hem Genetics, is a new hybrid series with a trailing habit. It is a vigorous grower and boasts large flowers with overlapping petals. It can be used in baskets and even groundcover applications. [gpn](#)

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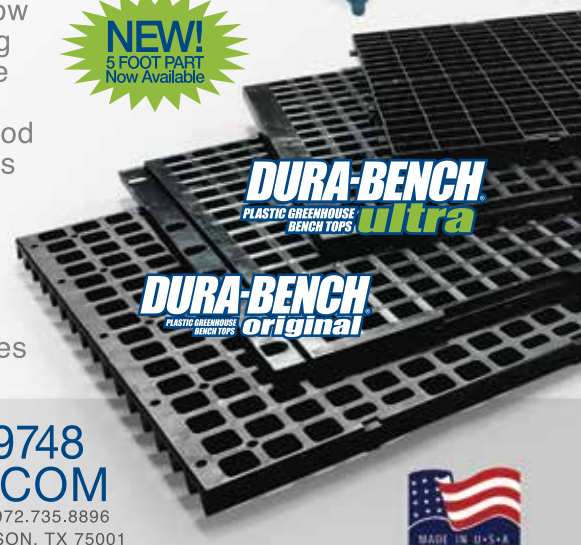


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