



# Trialing and Trendspotting Across the Atlantic

*Each year, during Week 24, dozens of breeders gather together in locations in Germany and The Netherlands to showcase their latest varieties and programs.*

**BY JASMINA DOLCE**

**A**lthough breeders and growers have previously shared stories with me about their experiences at the European Flower Trials, I didn't know exactly what to expect from my first trip to the event. I assumed it would be similar to the California Spring Trials, which it was, but there were certainly some obvious differences.

While there is some crossover in the attendees to both events, the Flower Trials is targeted to mostly European growers and retailers. And that's where the differences begin.

## **HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE**

At the Flower Trials, the German and Dutch breeders are on their home turf, and that in itself was incredibly fascinating. At the California Spring Trials, these breeders can be a bit limited in what they can show. On their home turf, however, their displays were limitless.

Take Westhoff, for instance, who is not only a breeder but also Germany's largest finished grower of bedding plants. They had a gorgeous setup of retail displays to inspire their garden center customers with merchandising ideas. Rather than display benches of the same varieties, they showed how retailers can present varieties of different species that play well together. They also used this same strategy on shipping carts. As we all know, gardeners need inspiration and guidance while shopping for plants. So Westhoff's displays offered up a solution for retailers.





Clockwise from bottom left: Kid-friendly and edibles display at Beekenkamp; retail display at Westhoff; begonias at Westhoff's breeding station; Beekenkamp's cutting sticking machine; Kindergarten display at Dümmer Orange.

Dümmer Orange and Beekenkamp happen to be two of the region's largest young plant producers. So aside from breeding, they are also selling young plants to companies like Westhoff and other finished growers. Their displays certainly reflected this part of their business, as they presented various programs available to their customers.

Beekenkamp's eye-catching displays tied together lifestyle with plants. That seems to be a recurring dilemma in our industry — how can we show consumers that plants aren't just for making outdoor spaces pretty? Plants can be used in a variety of ways, and Beekenkamp presented this idea with gorgeous displays that bring in various demographics, such as young gardeners and foodies: two groups that certainly need our focus.

Marketing to young gardeners was also a huge emphasis at the Dümmer Orange stop. They showcased their "Kindergarten" program, which is a way to get children involved in gardening.

The packaging is very kid friendly and basically promotes kids getting their hands dirty.

### BEHIND THE SCENES

While retail and merchandising displays were a huge focus at the trials, I also got to take a behind-the-scenes look at the greenhouses. I had the opportunity to walk through the breeding station at Westhoff, which was quite the eye opener. I was able to walk through with the actual breeders and learn about the traits their breeding is targeting. There is extreme diversity in their upcoming genetics, and I can't wait to see what passes and makes it to market. One product category that is new to Westhoff is begonias. Days and days of begonias filled the greenhouses, and it'll be interesting to see what they ultimately introduce next season.

I was also able to take a tour of the young plant operation at Beekenkamp's facilities. They use a ton of automated equipment, and it was amazing to see just how quickly everything

happens inside those greenhouses. Since 2012, they have been using cutting sticking machines and I've never seen anything like it, at least not in action. They have 30 machines that stick approximately 3,000 cuttings per hour. A robotic arm individualizes cutting material and sticks them into soil blocks.

### THE REAL STARS OF THE SHOW — NEW VARIETIES

I certainly can't talk about the Flower Trials without discussing the many new introductions on display. While many of the new varieties were on display in California in April, some breeders wait until Week 24 to debut certain items. It's also helpful to see some of the varieties from Spring Trials in a different environment, grown at a different time of year.

While I was unable to make it to each exhibitor this year, I was able to focus on a few specific product groups at the stops I did visit. Here are some of our favorites from this year's Flower Trials:



## *Bedding Plants at Westhoff*

**Cuphea.** One of the highlights at the Westhoff stop was the brand new Floriglory cuphea series. These plants are just loaded with flowers, about four or five times more floriferous than traditional cuphea on the market. They are also very early to flower.

**Calibrachoa.** The new Calitastic series is bred for extreme uniformity across the series. The ultimate goal with these calibrachoa is to be very predictable for the grower. They are very early to flower and each have an upright, mounded habit with large blooms.

**Portulaca.** Colorblast portulaca has been getting a lot of attention from growers. Consumers are always looking for drought-tolerant plants, but they still want bright colors. Here's their answer. There are three different types: solids, stripes and doubles. The stripes have been the biggest hit; those vivid bicolor blooms are hard to resist.



## *Pelargoniums at PAC*

**'Cassiopeia'.** This may just be PAC's biggest introduction this year. This interspecific geranium is similar to top-selling interspecifics on the market, but it has much smaller foliage. This is a benefit to growers as it is easier to control growth.

**'Darko Soft Pink'.** The Darko line has recently become very popular with growers. These dark-leaved geraniums are more compact and therefore easy to ship (for cuttings and finished plants). The dark foliage with the light blooms presents well at retail. Plus, because of the darkness of the foliage, the plants tackle nutrient deficiencies better as the leaves never really yellow.

**'TWOinONE Peach'.** The TWOinOne series is ideal for landscape applications. It is a more versatile garden geranium that can take more shade. The flowers are very large and the peach color really pops on this plant.





## Potted and Specialty Plants at Beekenkamp

**Lavender.** One new product category for Beekenkamp is *Lavandula stoechas*. The new Flirt series is a big hit with pollinators, such as butterflies and bees. Because of its compact habit, usage of this lavender is endless, from grower to end consumer. It is ideal for 5- to 8-inch pots.

**Celosia.** Kelos Fire was introduced a couple of years ago and is a plumosa type. Beekenkamp's newest celosia introduction is the Kelos Atomic series, which is a spicata type. The advantage of both series is that they are daylength neutral and available in a wide range of colors. They are incredible garden performers and continuously flower.

**Begonia.** *Begonia elatior* 'Claire' is a new model of durable garden type of begonia. Beekenkamp is breeding for quick production in 8-inch pots. This plant is vigorous and very well branched. It is loaded with flowers and has a more upright habit.



## Perennials at Diimmen Orange

**Salvia.** Salute is a true perennial salvia series with very strong colors. They are first year flowering and daylength neutral. Salute salvia has a medium height with very early flowering. It is an extremely fast crop, and in most cases, two weeks can be cut from production timing.

**Gaillardia.** The new SpinTop series is very compact with colors that show well at retail. They have very large flowers with a velvet-like shine. This first year flowering series is available in three colors, and two more will be introduced next season. [gpn](#)