



Prepping for Spring Trials

It is almost that time of year again for the annual pilgrimage out west for the California Spring Trials (CAST) where growers, retailers, brokers and breeders from all over the world get an opportunity to see what new genetics will be available for the next season. This year, Spring Trials will take place April 1-6, throughout California.

Many people will use this opportunity to evaluate and plan what should be in their program for the following year. Others will enjoy the week to run into old friends and have a brief break from spring.

For breeders, California Spring Trials is anything but relaxing. For them, this week has been months, if not a year, in the making. This is their opportunity to show off to the industry what new and novel genetics they have come up with for the following year. Each one hoping to have the next big hit that will change the market, get into everyone's program and, ultimately, into the consumers' homes and gardens.



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GROWING FOR THE TRIALS

Growing display plants for CAST is no easy task. This is the most critical step of everything that goes into CAST week. If you are going to introduce new genetics to the industry, you must be able to show someone a living example and one that looks great, too.

When growing for this event, you cannot just grow one hanging basket or patio pot and think you are covered for the week. You need to have backups for that planter and backups for the backups. It is not uncommon to grow 10 times what your actual need might be for CAST.

Growers will start plans across a month span to make sure they have the perfect plant to show. They will use different plant growth regulators and fertilizer regimes to tone the plants. If the plants do not look up to grade, they will not make the cut.

Many breeders will use multiple growers in different parts of California to help protect themselves in case there are weather issues in one part of the state.

DAILY MAINTENANCE

Once CAST finally arrives, daily dead heading, watering, grooming and repositioning plants is required to make sure they are always looking their absolute best. Depending on which location breeders are showing at they will have a back room of extras available to them when they need to swap out plants, others will have midweek deliveries from the California growers who grew the plants so they can swap out the tired plants for fresh ones.

Many of the facilities that people show at are not greenhouses, or they are in packing areas with little natural light, which adds to the challenge of keeping everything looking good. For those companies who are showing in areas without natural light, it is very important to keep up the overall look of the plants. Many sun-loving annuals start to lose their luster after they have been indoors for an extended period and are not up to grade to continue to be on display.

For those exhibitors who elect to not show in a greenhouse this means finding a suitable area that can accommodate the displays. Additionally, because the California weather can be unpredictable at times you will need to have some sort of shelter over the plants in case of rain or wind. This usually comes in the form of large party tents, which in recent years have the option to include translucent roofs. These tents, however, cause their own issues with not having any environmental controls other than opening and closing the sides.

All of this is necessary to make sure everything looks top notch come show time so that growers and retailers are encouraged to add these newest genetics to their programs for the upcoming season.

The next time many people will see these new genetics will be in the "real world" at all the different summer trial gardens around the country. Then, growers will be able to see how they compete against other breeder's genetics side by side.

If you are on the lookout for new genetics and the next "game changer" for your business, you should head west for 2017 California Spring Trials — there's nothing else like it. [gpn](http://gpn.com)