



Begonia Megawatt Series



Begonia 'Top Spin Scarlet'

## Summer Trials: Top-Performing Seed Annuals



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*From begonias to vincas, here are some of the most impressive seed varieties observed at various summer trials in 2016.*

**I**n the last two articles I focused on specific breeding companies and their top-performing vegetative varieties. This month and next, I will highlight seed introductions over the past few years from many different breeding companies. The varieties I am describing were eye catchers in multiple trial sites last summer with excellent performance, including

vigor, uniformity, floriferousness, flower vibrancy, foliage quality and heat tolerance.

Many of you have these varieties in spring production and are using them in different production applications. I hope your evaluations of these varieties at the end of the season will reinforce my observations, which are based on performance in many geographical areas.

### **BEGONIA MEGAWATT SERIES (PANAMERICAN SEED)**

This interspecific begonia comprised of two green and two bronze leaf varieties was introduced at the California Spring Trials last year. I saw them in Florida at Costa Farms' trial in January and in early April before the official launch and witnessed the series in landscape beds and containers throughout the summer. It performed as advertised, demonstrating earliness, compactness, uniformity, heat tolerance and adaptability in the landscape, baskets or containers. The bronze leaf varieties were faster to flower than the green leaf varieties. Many growers will

have this series in production for spring sales, and I look forward to seeing the finished product and receiving feedback from the industry later in the season. Pan American Seed introduced a red/bronze leaf variety late last fall which will also be in production this spring.

### **BEGONIA TOP SPIN SERIES (SYNGENTA FLOWERS)**

Another promising begonia series is the Topspin green leaf series from Syngenta. This series was introduced for 2017 and was entered in multiple trials last season. It is available in four colors and a mix. It is characterized by earliness, compactness and uniformity, maturing at 8-10 inches. It demonstrated these attributes in every trial that I visited. It reportedly tolerates cooler temperatures in spring production. We will have additional feedback on this at the end of the production season.

### **BEGONIA 'FUNKY PINK' (BENARY)**


This standalone interspecific begonia variety was introduced by Benary for the 2017 season, and it was outstanding in trials at Metrolina in North Carolina and Raker in Michigan last summer. It is an extremely well-branched variety with both single and double pink flowers. In basket production at both trial sites, it was floriferous and compact, and performed well in sun or shade. It is a novelty, eye-catching begonia, and based on what I saw last summer will have a great consumer appeal and success. Hopefully, Benary will add more colors to form a series.

### **CANNA CANNOVA SERIES (BALL INGENUITY)**

This first F1 series was bred in the Netherlands by Takii and introduced to North America by Ball Ingenuity three years ago. There are four green leaf varieties, including an orange, for 2017, and a bronze leaf scarlet, which is a Fleuroselect winner. We have excellent choices in canna

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**Begonia 'Funky Pink'**



**Canna Cannova Series**

today; what are the distinguishing features of this series? I have evaluated Cannova in southern and northern trials the past two years and in spring production throughout the country. The word that comes to mind is *versatility*. The series is characterized by uniformity, unblemished foliage, heat tolerance, cold tolerance in spring production, vibrant colors and adaptability in quarts, gallons and mixed containers. It has been used in landscape plantings in mass beds or as a thriller. Cannas should be a part of every grower's spring production. The most important aspect is long-lasting performance, which results in success for landscapers and consumers.

**NEMESIA SEVENTH HEAVEN SERIES (FLORANOVA)**

Floranova was established in the United Kingdom in 1978 and is now recognized as one of the leading flower breeders. They have added vegetative varieties to the portfolio as well. They have brought many new and novel plants to the industry including ipomea, begonias, zinnias, vinca and now a very unique nemesia series from seed. The Seventh Heaven series has been trialed the past couple seasons and is made up of compact, heavily branched plants with heavy flowering. They have exhibited exceptional heat tolerance and early summer endurance in multiple trials at Metrolina and Raker. The Seventh

Heaven series also features the first bicolor of its kind from seed, 'Seventh Heaven Lavender Bicolor'. The flowers are larger than other series from seed and very fragrant. Availability from plug suppliers was limited for 2017, but based on summer performance last year we should see this series in portfolios in 2018.

**IMPATIENS WALLERIANA LOLLIPOP SERIES (BENARY)**

This series was introduced at the California Spring Trials in 2014 and did not create a lot of immediate excitement for two main reasons: The downy mildew problem, which began in Florida in the fall of 2012 and continued to impact the



Nemesia 'Seventh Heaven Lavender Bicolor'



Impatiens 'Lollipop Bubblegum Pink'



Pentas 'Bee Bright Lipstick'



Vinca 'Valiant Pure White'

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market through 2015 reduced production numbers significantly, and the large number of walleriana series in the marketplace. The mildew problem has lessened and sales have increased, but the competition remains. So what sets this series apart in trials, production and performance? Benary has entered the series in multiple trials since 2014 and results are as advertised: uniformity, compactness, eight basic but intense colors, heavy flower canopy, and excellent performance in containers, landscape and trial beds. The flower timing is excellent with Cherry Red blooming slightly earlier. Many plug growers added this series to their portfolio for 2017 for good reason.

**PENTAS LANCEOLATA BEE BRIGHT SERIES (SYNGENTA)**

The Bee Brights were introduced for 2017 along with the Honeycluster series. The Bee Brights, comprised of four colors, are the most compact of the two and demonstrated a tight, well-branched habit with an excellent flower canopy, large florets and vibrant colors. Lipstick was the most vibrant color in multiple

trials, and red was the most compact. Both series have excellent heat tolerance and are pollinator friendly. New introductions are on the horizon from different breeders so the choices will increase.

**VINCA VALIANT SERIES (PANAMERICAN SEED)**

This series was introduced at California Spring Trials in 2015 and in production last year. The series is available in six colors and delivers a vigorous upright growth habit, large flowers and excellent all-season performance into early fall. The series offers intermediate disease resistance and provides excellent color impact in the landscape. Due to its excellent vigor and cold tolerance, it exhibits both summer and fall longevity. The series is adaptable in large containers and, because of strong apical dominance, carries flowers above the foliage canopy.

The above variety descriptions just cover a portion of my seed annuals evaluation. Be sure to check out my article next month where I will continue the discussion on top-performing seed varieties from the summer trials. *gpn*