

BY JASMINA DOLCE

STORYTELLING

at the Trials

Now that the Spring Trials are over, it's time to take the stories the breeding companies and suppliers shared with us and use them to better your businesses for next season.

No two California Spring Trials are ever the same. Each year sees its trends and opportunities. Certain plant classes have their moment to shine; breeders follow consumer trends and change

up their focus each season. This year was all about reaching the consumer on numerous levels and working on efficiencies to increase profits. Here are some of the stories Spring Trials exhibitors shared with us that are sure to inspire success in the greenhouse.

Telling Their Story

Connections — we all crave them. People want to feel a personal connection to almost everything, whether it's the music they listen to, the clothes they wear, or even the plants they purchase. Even when making business decisions, it certainly helps to understand the stories of those you're working with. So at all levels of the supply chain, the industry is working hard to share each story at every level.



▲ In this day and age, it's always refreshing to hear success stories from family-owned businesses that have withstood the test of time. This year, **Benary** is celebrating its 175th anniversary and provided attendees with a timeline of the business' highlights through the years. One that inspired their new Super Hero marigold series occurred in 1946 when the Benary family lost everything after World War II. Fritz Benary decided to ride his bicycle throughout Germany collecting seeds to restart the business, and for that, he's the company's "Super Hero."



◀ **Plug Connection** has introduced a new rose collection, *True Blooms*, that aims to deliver all the beauty without the trouble. It was fascinating listening to the breeder, Ping Lim, describe his passion for roses that present outstanding color, delightful fragrance and are easy to grow. Multiple *True Blooms* have already won awards before even hitting the market!

Gerbera is such a versatile category; they can be used in the landscape, as impactful patio pots, in pollinator gardens, as potted gift items and more. So **Florist Holland** created multiple displays sharing the story behind each. We loved how they use *Patio Gerberas* as “the finishing touch” and created a “5 reasons” for the benefits of *Garvinea*.



Crazy for Cuts

We have been hearing it a lot at various levels of the industry — cut flowers are hot. We’ve seen it for ourselves at retail; decorating with cut flowers is making quite the comeback. From gift giving to simply decorating a table setting, the value of cut flowers continues to grow.



▶ While **Sakata** did not introduce any new varieties to its cut flower program, they presented all of their best-selling cuts for attendees.



- ▲ **Dümmen Orange** did a great job of showing how the end consumer could bring plants indoors for everyday décor. One display that stood out was their dining table presentation, which include small touches like this calla lily on a place setting.



- ▲ **American Takii** had a ton of its experimental varieties on display that are still in the works. One that stood out was this helianthus, 'Marley', that is perfect for cutting. The antique shades of the blooms are incredibly on trend.



- ▲ **Nir Nursery** is a brand new exhibitor at Spring Trials, and the company displayed its unique wax flowers and foliage. One of our favorites was 'Rey', an intergeneric cross between verticordia and chamelaucium. Each branch produces 10 to 30 bright pink flowers.



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Shoulder Season Opportunities

Spring is peak season for growers — this is just the nature of our business. But it is increasingly important that the industry as a whole remains at the forefront of consumers' minds all year long. Once summer ends, we can't have them forget about us! That's why growers need to focus on increasing their shoulder season sales.

Autumn is just as opportune of a time to garden as spring. Plenty of cool-weather crops — even beyond mums — are out there to utilize. And this is a wonderful time to decorate with indoor crops as well.

Speaking of indoors, succulents continue to gain more and more popularity at the consumer level. Some are great for outdoor applications, but they're the perfect plant for year-round indoor décor.



▲ **Darwin Perennials** (left) displayed its perennial line alongside traditional autumn décor, while **Dümmen Orange** (right) showcased how various plant categories — from callas and orchids to gerber daisies and osteospermum to kalanchoes and poinsettias — could be incorporated.

- ▼ **Proven Winners** (left) has partnered with Chris Hansen of Garden Solutions and debuted its line of succulents, Coral Creations. They also designed succulent recipes of varieties that complement each other for long-lived success. **Jaldety** (right) also displayed its multiple succulents in eye-catching combinations.



Gifts Are Alive

As more consumers use plants to beautify their indoors, we need to remind them that live goods make the perfect gift for almost any occasion. However, when they see plants in a generic container sitting on a bench or rack, they don't think "gift." They need clever packaging, tags and signage to blatantly show them plants can be gifts.



- ▲ 'SunBuzz' is a naturally compact, smaller-leafed sunflower from **PanAmerican Seed**. It will make a great potted gift item at the grocery level, and consumers will enjoy the multiple flushes of blooms.



- ▲ We got a sneak peek of the calibrachoa trees from **Hishtil** last year, but this year they made their official debut. These grafted plants have incredible novel appeal.



- ▲ Everyone at the trials was loving the concept behind 'Kaylee' dianthus from **HilverdaKooij**. The tags were made to resemble a perfume bottle, along with other POP materials.

- ▼ With its calming scent, lavender is always a wonderful gift. But 'Blue Spear' from **Kieft Seed** has the perfect upright texture for a fun potted application.



Working on Efficiencies

In a perfect world, plants would just sell themselves — at a premium cost. Sadly, the industry doesn't work that way. So in order to remain profitable, growers need to find every way possible to save money and maintain an efficient operation.

Many of the breeders showed us just how they're working to help growers produce and sell crops leaner, easier and wiser.



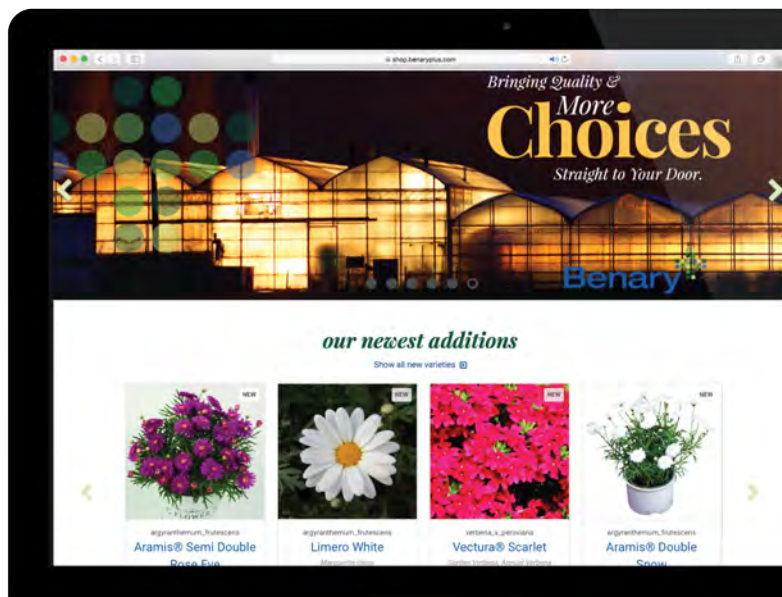
▲ **Dümmen Orange** was giving demonstrations of how its new Basewell rooting technology works and is offering growers trial packs to test out. This new technology is intended to simplify the rooting process by delivering transplant-ready cuttings with a patented gel coating.



▲ **Pacific Plug & Liner** demonstrated how they are using Growcoon, a biodegradable net, which has resulted in faster finish times. They are also working on a vernalization program and displayed a lavender comparison trial.



Benary+ continues its efforts to simplify the ordering process and demonstrated how to use its Web Shop for quick online ordering.



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Streamlining Programs

This year was all about streamlining product offerings. There is so much to choose from in the marketplace, and selections need to be more focused for the grower. At the consumer level, gardeners just want a good quality plant that will survive. They certainly don't need dozens of options to choose from. Breeders are identifying essential categories, and delivering plants to fulfill those categories. This requires consolidation for some and brand new breakthroughs for others.



▲ **Sakata** announced that they are consolidating the SunPatiens line from three habits to two. The Compact varieties will remain the go-to for high-density production, but they removed Spreading and moved those over to the Vigorous line and also added three new colors to make it a complete collection.



▲ **Selecta** is simplifying its MiniFamous calibrachoa into two lines: Uno is bred for earliness and more compact containers, while Neo is made up of vigorous varieties meant for more traditional baskets.



▲ **Syngenta Flowers** has been one of the biggest innovators in geranium breeding, especially in the interspecific category. Their Calliope series has been a grower favorite, but there was a need for a more compact interspecific geranium for small pot production. Enter Moxie!

We've got even more Spring Trials coverage for you. Stay tuned for the July issue of GPN, where we will go into more detail about the new variety introductions.