



Precocious Annual Introductions FOR 2021

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The 2020 Costa Spring Premier Trial offered a glimpse into new and improved standouts for the upcoming season.



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The 2020 trial season begins at Costa Farms in Miami, Florida, and I visited in late January to evaluate the 2021 annual introductions. The beds were planted week 50, and I chose the adjective “precocious” to highlight their early and prolific flowering. These plants will not achieve this level of maturity until early summer in the northern trials, but in south Florida the average day temperatures in January are in the 70s and the lows are around 60.

This evaluation was based primarily on early flower color, floriferousness, plant vigor and unique color patterns. More than 20 international flower breeders are participating in the trial this year, which consists of more than 400 annuals and 200 perennials.

Many of the varieties represented here will be entered in summer trials throughout the country for mid and late summer plant performance evaluations. Specific new and improved series and varieties will supplant traditional and current plants in the marketplace based on summer performance in regional trials and subsequent marketing and promotion. These trials and the evaluations that follow are essential and significant for the growth and development of the horticultural industry and will ultimately benefit the consumer.

1. PETUNIA ‘BEE’S KNEES’

Ball FloraPlant

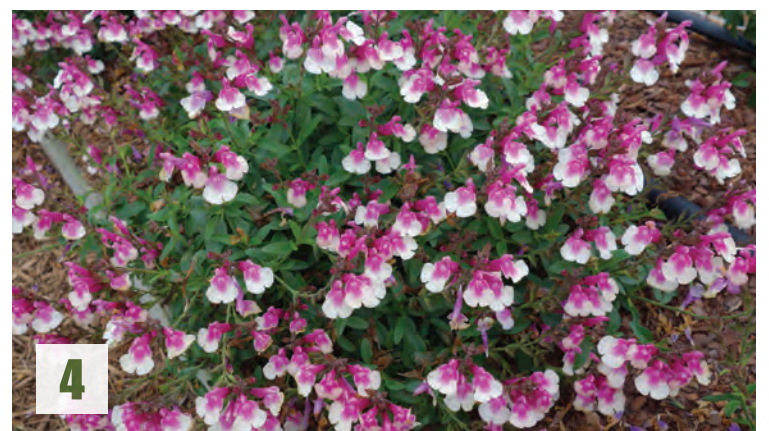
The definition of the term the bee’s knees is: to be excellent, a standout and something highly admired. This definition is appropriate for this new vegetative standalone petunia which manifested vigor, midsize flowers, a mounded and well-branched growth habit, earliness, floriferousness and two-toned highly saturated yellow flowers that were vibrant and dynamic. We have many yellow seed and vegetative petunias in the marketplace, and many diminish in color saturation and stability throughout the summer. In this early trial in January, and later in March on my second visit, ‘Bee’s Knees’ continued its eye-catching brightness



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and vibrancy. This variety will be a game changer if it maintains this deep yellow color throughout the summer. I look forward to observing and evaluating this variety in multiple late summer regional trials to ascertain its garden performance.

2. CALIBRACHOA 'CALIBASKET GLAMOROUS'

Westhoff

The Westhoff calibrachoa portfolio is impressive with over seven series and a standalone variety. The Calibasket series complements the Calitastic series with a more vigorous, trailing and mounded habit creating a larger basket. Yellow was added for 2020, and Glamorous, which was exclusive this year, will be available to all brokers for 2021. This variety was extremely early to flower, exceptionally vigorous, and produced a colorful canopy of deep orchid flowers with light orchid petals and a yellow throat. It was dynamic and distinctive. This series can be produced in quarts, combinations and baskets.

3. SALVIA 'SALGOON STRAWBERRY LAKE'

HilverdaFlorist

The salvia Salgoon interspecific series was entered in regional summer trials in 2019 with a colorful and impressive performance, which was highlighted in my article last November. Six are entered in the Costa trial, including three new varieties for 2021. The plants manifested earliness, vigor and floriferousness with ostentatious bicolored inflorescences that were positioned above the foliage for a colorful display. The most unique variety in the series was Strawberry Lake, which has vibrant flowers with red corollas and magenta calyxes. Production application will include 6 inch, and 1 and 2 gallons. The series will continue to flower without pruning and will have versatility in landscape sites and large patio containers in full sun exposures.

4. SALVIA GREGGII 'MIRAGE ROSE BICOLOR'

Darwin Perennials

We have many outstanding standalone greggii varieties in the

market, but the Mirage series — introduced in 2017 with a wide range of colors — offers a uniform, mounded, early flowering, heat- and frost-tolerant plant with versatility and multiple applications in spring and summer programs. It is hardy to Zone 7 in southern

markets and is used in annual programs in the northern regions. The color palette consists of 13 varieties including Blue and Rose Bicolor for 2021. Rose Bicolor was unquestionably one of the most striking plants in the trial for one reason: racemes with

the contrasting deep rose upper lip and white lower lip that were stunning. This new introduction will have outstanding retail appeal. This is a versatile series for bench run production with uniformity, excellent basal branching and maturing at 12 to 14 inches.



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5. COLEUS 'DRAGON HEART'

Ball FloraPlant

The world of coleus continues to expand with the introduction of new and unique vegetative coleus for sun and shade. Ball FloraPlant offers three different classes based on mature size, including the vigorous, medium and compact. 'Dragon Heart' is a new introduction for 2021 and complements the seven midsize varieties in the series. Even in late January the plant manifested a mounded, tightly branched habit with reticulate venation and a rugose foliage texture. The chartreuse foliage overlaid with deep burgundy venation was stunning and impactful. I look forward to seeing the performance of this variety in the summer trials. Versatility is the attribute that comes to mind in describing this new introduction with multiple applications in patio containers and landscape beds in sun or shade.



6. CANNA 'CANNOVA GREEN LEAF SCARLET'

American Takii

This inaugural canna F1 seed series comprises seven vibrant colors and two new varieties for 2021. The series has become

ubiquitous in the market for multiple reasons including heat tolerance, drought tolerance, summer color, verticality and multiple applications for spring production in quarts, gallons, and 2-gallon production. The consumer and the landscape industry are using this series in garden beds and as a thriller in containers. Scarlet is new for 2021 and manifested color stability and vibrant color. This variety has a richer, deeper color than Cannova Red Shades, which has been discontinued. Liners will be available from multiple suppliers in assorted sizes for 2021.

and Bumble Bee Orange for 2021. The Bumble Bee varieties may have the most salient and pronounced star-shaped flowers in the industry. The wide star pattern with large flowers is flashy and vigorous. Bumble Bee Orange, with the two-toned petals with deep orange center, light orange margins, and the yellow star was magnetic and the only orange star type in the industry. The series offers vigor, large flowers, a trailing habit, and excellent heat tolerance. This series has excellent application in mixed containers and baskets.

the attributes of floriferousness, heat tolerance and compactness. There are now 18 compact and 13 vigorous varieties available for 2021, as well as six SunPatiens designer kits. I have visited regional basket trials in late summer and early fall for many years, and the SunPatiens combinations have demonstrated outstanding seasonal performance in all regions of the country.

7. CALIBRACHOA 'CAN-CAN BUMBLE BEE ORANGE'

Ball FloraPlant

In March I highlighted some of the most dynamic and unique calibrachos in the 2019 summer trials based on color patterns. We have hundreds of varieties available today, and breeders continue to vie for superiority in the market with audacious and vivacious colors and, most importantly, garden performance. One of those series that reflects this breeding goal is the Bumble Bee colors, including Bumble Bee Pink, Bumble Bee Blue

8. IMPATIENS 'SUNPATIENS COMPACT HOT PINK'

Sakata

Sakata has introduced two new compact varieties for 2021, Rose Glow and Hot Pink, which replace Neon Pink and Pink. Both selections were in the trial and even though it was late January they were floriferous and eye catching. Hot Pink exhibited outstanding vibrancy and color stability and has a more compact habit and shorter internodes than the original pink. These introductions will be in many regional trials this summer, and I would expect them to manifest

9. ANGELONIA 'ALONIA BIG BICOLOR PURPLE'

Danziger

This interspecific, vegetative midsize series has become an integral program in spring bench run production for many reasons. The plants offer uniformity, an upright habit, glossy dark green foliage, strong stem caliper, earliness and large flowers. Two bicolors have been added to the Big series for 2021, Big Bicolor Pink and Big Bicolor Purple. Both varieties were in the trial, flowering early and extremely floriferous, and Big Bicolor Purple has distinctive purple and white bicolor flowers that add to the color palette of the series. The varieties are excellent for combination and patio containers and landscape

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sites. Angelonia are a wonderful genera for the consumer offering heat, humidity and drought tolerance, as well as being a pollinator for bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.

10. VINCA 'CORA CASCADE BRIGHT ROSE'

Syngenta Flowers

This cascading F1 vinca introduced over 10 years ago added a new dimension to the summer basket and combination programs throughout the country. This was a transformational series that offered the grower a trailing vinca with a high level of resistance to aerial Phytophthora, uniformity, large nonfading flowers and superlative performance in hot and humid conditions in full sun or partial shade. The series flowers prolifically, maintains a mounded, trailing habit, and has multiple production applications, including combinations, mixed containers and landscape beds. On a personal level, I have been container gardening for well over 30 years and have planted and tested hundreds of new introductions. The Cora Cascades are one series that has continued to perform and flower profusely until frost. Bright Rose is the new introduction for 2021, and it manifested an intense luminosity and vibrant flower canopy.

11. PETUNIA 'EASY WAVE PINK FUSION'

PanAmerican Seed

PanAmerican Seed continues to add new unique colors to the Easy Wave series, and Pink Fusion will be introduced for 2021. The bicolor rose flowers with striking deep rose veins were striking in the trial, and the plants in the beds were mounded and uniform. This is the earliest flowering variety in the Wave collection and is day length neutral. As with all Easy Wave colors, Pink Fusion has application in 306 premium packs, quarts, gallons and baskets. There are now 18 varieties and eight Easy Wave mixes available, and production and garden performance has been exemplary for floriferousness, dense foliage canopy, heat tolerance and color stability. This product line is imperative for spring production and has unparalleled consumer demand. The marketing campaigns and promotions to support this petunia crop are unparalleled in the industry.

12. PHLOX 'GISELE RED'

Selecta One

I was excited to see four new introductions in the Gisele series for 2021. There are currently five colors in the series, and with the addition of Red, Light Pink+Eye, Purple and Scarlet the color palette is now extensive. This interspecific phlox has demonstrated outstanding heat tolerance, vigor and vibrant colors in the market and summer trials for many years. The large tubular flowers with five lobes are highly saturated and colorful, and many of the varieties have a well

defined eye. There are comparable interspecific phlox in the marketplace with a vibrant and highly saturated red, so the addition of a red to the Gisele line is significant. With a total of nine colors for 2021, it is now the most complete line in the industry. This series has become an important component in mixed containers and is utilized in landscape sites.

13. VERBENA 'FIREHOUSE VIOLET WINK'

Ball FloraPlant

This new verbena introduction for 2021 was bold and dramatic in the trial with deep violet flowers and a conspicuous white eye. Ball FloraPlant offers three series including the compact Cadet Uprights, midsize Firehouse and the spreading Endurascapes. The Firehouse series replaced the Aztec series in 2019 and demonstrates new and improved breeding. The series comprises 11 varieties including three new introductions for 2021: Blue Fizz, Purple Fizz and Violet Wink. The series was in multiple trials last year and demonstrated excellent heat tolerance, minimal cycling and powdery mildew resistance. This is a mounded series that is used in mixed baskets and containers and is a component in more than 10 MixMaster multispecies sun combos.

14. PETUNIA 'SPLASH DANCE BOLERO BLUE'

Danziger

We have seen many new speckled pattern petunias since the introduction of Night Sky from Selecta One. We now have three international breeding companies producing these uniquely colored petunias. Dümmer Orange will introduce the Surprise Sparkling series and Selecta One adds the 'Headliner Crystal Sky', 'Headliner Electric Purple Sky', and 'Mainstage Glacier Sky'. Danziger will introduce the Splash Dance series for 2021, comprised of Magenta Mambo, Purple Polka Dot and Bolero Blue, which were in the Costa trial. Danziger trialed many experimentals throughout the United States and Israel last year, and these three, based on flower stability, speckle retention, earliness, heat tolerance and habit, were selected for release for next season's production and retail sales. In this early trial, Bolero Blue manifested the most clearly defined speckled pattern. The entire series, as well as competing lines, will be entered in regional trials throughout the country this summer for a more objective and thorough evaluation.

It is my plan to return in late March to evaluate a more mature trial including combination baskets, annuals and perennials.

My June article will be based on performance and evaluation of additional new introductions for 2021, stay tuned! [gpnmag.com](https://www.gpnmag.com)