

# Eight Years of Progress

**It's hard to believe** it's been almost eight years since I had the honor of being named to GPN's 40 Under 40 class. When I realized how long it has been, I took the time to look back on the years since and review the progress that has taken place in plant introductions. There were a few themes that I thought merited calling attention to.

## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENTS

As an industry, the brand-new plants usually receive the lion's share of the fanfare — and I have to admit, I'm just as guilty. Introducing a brand-new genus or a new hybrid is exciting for a plantsperson. There is a huge amount of joy when an industry colleague asks, "What in the world is that?"

Plants like 'Diamond Frost' or 'Blue My Mind' are major milestones and should be celebrated, but we shouldn't forget that a lot of breeding companies are also working to improve the older genetics, too. These improvements benefit everyone in the supply chain.

Increased disease resistance, better branching, and improved performance, along with many other developments, make both growers and gardeners more successful.

With many new people gardening, these improvements could prove key in keeping the gardening public engaged after many years in decline. A recent example is the new version of 'Supertunia Royal Velvet'. The original Royal Velvet was in the Proven Winners line for almost 20 years. It is a best-selling variety and beloved by many, but we knew we could enhance a great variety to make it even better. It took countless attempts to find the new variety, but it finally hits garden centers this spring.



'Supertunia Royal Velvet Improved'



'Truffula Pink' gomphrena

## STRONG TRENDS IN HERBS AND VEGETABLES

A desire to add an edible line to Proven Winners goes back even before I joined the team nine years ago. My predecessor, Rick Schoellhorn, made several attempts, but finding fruits, herbs and vegetables that are truly distinctive is not an easy task for a company new to that category.

From my perspective, I was seeing many of my friends finally getting into gardening, but they weren't starting with petunias or



'Amazel' basil

hydrangeas. For the most part, they were planting vegetables and herbs. I was excited that they were finally starting to pick up gardening, but in a category that we hadn't broken into yet.

Things changed when Pleasant View Gardens hired Adam Moseley to be their trial manager. Adam, who had just completed his

master's degree under Dave Clark at the University of Florida, had been working with basil and breeding toward downy mildew resistance. When he graduated, there wasn't a finished product yet, but Clark continued with the project. After some more breeding, 'Amazel' basil was finally ready. It was the product that we had been looking for to help us kick off Proven Harvest, and its downy mildew resistance continues to win awards across the U.S.

To add to the line, we again found truly unique breeding right down the hall with Harry Klee. He had been working on tomato breeding and already had two outstanding products — Garden Gem and Garden Treasure. In these products, he had successfully married modern disease resistance with heirloom flavor — a trait that has often been lost in modern tomato breeding. Given that his program was based in Florida, he also had plants that performed well through the summers at all of our trial stations. This whole article could be about those two tomatoes, but instead, I encourage you to read Slate's article, "This Is the Perfect Tomato," to learn the full background.

## BEATING THE HEAT

Currently one of our top priorities is adding more products to our line that work for our Southern customers. It's not that we're ignoring our customers in Iowa or Pennsylvania; any products that can reliably go through the summer in the South make fantastic products for the rest of the country as well. A big step forward was moving our trial station out of California and ramping up our trials in Florida.

We've been trialing in Florida for almost two decades now, but over the last five years we increased that space to approximately three linear miles. The increased trialing has helped us identify some outstanding new products. 'Suncredible Yellow' helianthus, 'Sweet Caroline Medusa' ipomoea, 'Luscious Royale Red Zone' lantana, 'Truffula Pink' gomphrena, and Double Up begonias are a few of my favorites. To highlight our progress in this area, we've also teamed up with Norman Winter, "The Garden Guy," to reach more consumers about our Heat Is On collection.

It's hard to predict what the next eight years will bring, but I'm sure that our industry's resourceful plant breeders will continue to wow us with their incredible work. And I'm looking forward to every step of the process! [gpn](#)



Kevin Hurd is director of new products with Proven Winners and a member of GPN's 40 Under 40 Class of Class of 2013. He can be reached at [kevin@provenwinners.com](mailto:kevin@provenwinners.com).