

From SEED COATINGS to Cut Flowers



GPN headed to Ball Horticultural Co. in Illinois this summer for an inside look at new construction, variety introductions and industry trends.

BY ABBY MCGARRY

Ball Horticultural Co. in West Chicago, Illinois, is as much picturesque as it is functional as the company's worldwide headquarters. The Gardens at Ball span 10.5 acres of display beds planted each year with annuals, perennials, cut flowers, and vegetables, beautifully manicured and ready for visitors.

GPN visited West Chicago twice this season, first for Darwin Perennials Day on June 22, and then for Ball Seed Customer Days on July 28 and 29. The gardens were filled with hundreds of new introductions from across the industry representing over 77 breeding companies.

In addition to strolling through the gardens, attendees could learn from trend-focused presentations, such as biocontrol agents, container demos, and cut flower production, as well as tour the Ball Helix Lab and Ball Premier Lab and Seed Distribution.

The annual events draw professionals from every sector of the horticulture industry, and there were plenty of takeaways for growers.



BALL HELIX

Over the past few years, Ball Horticultural Co. worked on new construction to house the Ball Helix Central Research and Development team, which, now completed, houses a team of 40 in molecular biology, plant pathology, tissue culture, cellular biology, computational biology, molecular marker development and more.

The new facility puts these teams alongside the rest of the employees in West Chicago, which the company says fosters better internal and external communication about research activities. Floor-to-ceiling windows and the curved architecture of the building bring the landscape gardens as close to indoors as possible.



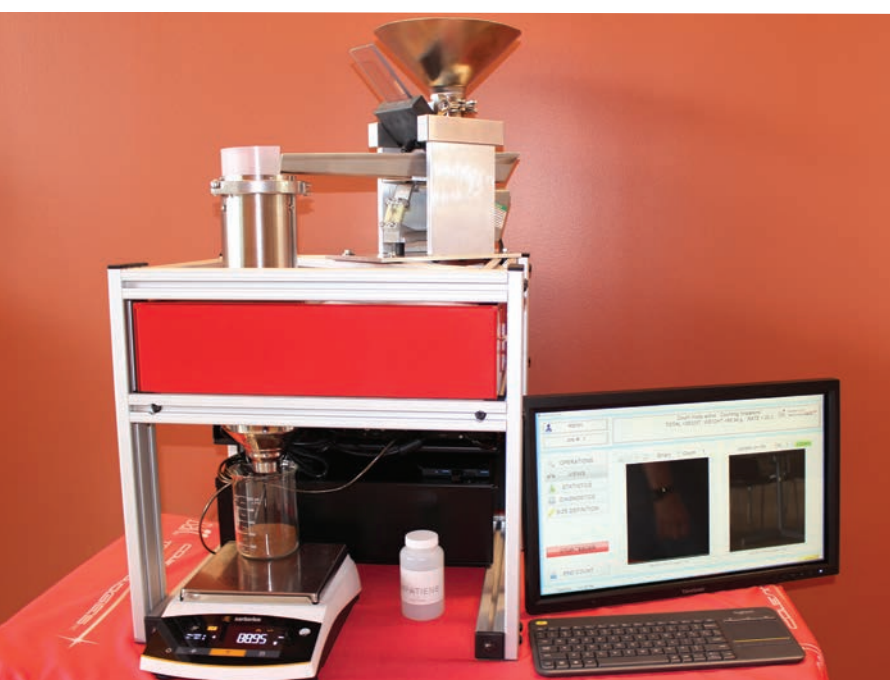
CONTAINER RECIPES

Mixes are no doubt hot items at retail across all categories, but for growers it is all about easy recipes to grow in production. Joan Mazat of the Mixed Container Solutions team and Ball Ingenuity gave attendees “Container Explainer Demos” during Ball Seed Customer Days.

Some of her tips include using perennials, annuals, houseplants and tropicals all together in a container; looking at seed items that can give a premium look at retail but be affordable for the grower; keeping in mind consumer trends such as less deadheading when choosing components; and using herbs in a container for scent.

One of Mazat’s favorite containers for sun (on the left) includes *Cyperus* ‘Prince Tut’, *calibrachoa* ‘Conga Orange Kiss’, *impatiens* ‘Solarscape Magenta Bliss’, foliage *celosia* ‘Sol Lizzard Leaf’, *scaevola* ‘Fairy White’, *ipomoea batatas* ‘Tricolor’ and *Angelonia* ‘AngelMist Spreading Berry Sparkler’. Another favorite (on the right) is made up of *Cyperus gracilis*, *calibrachoa* ‘Conga Yellow’, *impatiens* ‘Solarscape Orange Burst’, *Angelonia* ‘Serena Purple’ and *portulaca* ‘Río Grande Magenta’.





BALL PREMIER LAB AND SEED DISTRIBUTION

More than 25 million seeds — packaged in 16,000+ vials and packets — are shipped from the West Chicago, Illinois, location every day, and this tour gave an inside look at what exactly that large capacity means for the industry.

The Ball Premier Lab started in 1983 and now 80% of all seed that comes into the building goes through some sort of seed enhancement process. According to the team, film coating seeds has become more popular to ensure better flowability through seeder machines and to give better visibility in the plug tray.

As for counting and distribution, Ball's new seed counter — equipped with a camera and mirrors — slashes the time it takes to package by count. The counter has a maximum count speed of 2,000 seeds per second.

CUT FLOWERS

Cut flowers have been at least a topic of conversation at every industry event this year, and Ball Seed Customer Days were no exception with two different presentations: "Increasing Cut Flower Production and Income" and "Cut Flower Perennials." The cut flower beds and an overflowing cart situated in the gardens allowed field and greenhouse growers to see the latest cut flowers for farmers markets and florists.

Dave Dowling, cut flower specialist with Ball – ColorLink, led the talk. He provided grower attendees with a list of numerous cut flower perennials in order of priority. Here are his top five, with peonies taking the No. 1 spot, as "everyone should be growing peonies," says Dowling:

1. Peony — Sarah Bernhardt, Coral Charm, Kansas, Monsieur Jules Elie, Red Charm and Duchess de Nemours;
2. Baptisia — Australis, Twilite Prairieblues, Screaming Yellow;
3. Achillea — Yarrow: Moonshine, Coronation Gold, Terracotta, Paprika, Colorado Mix;
4. Lysimachia: Clethroides — Gooseneck Loosestrife; and
5. Pycnanthemum — Mountain Mint: Muticum. [gpn](#)