

Features

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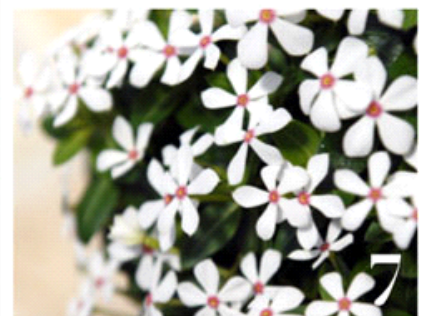
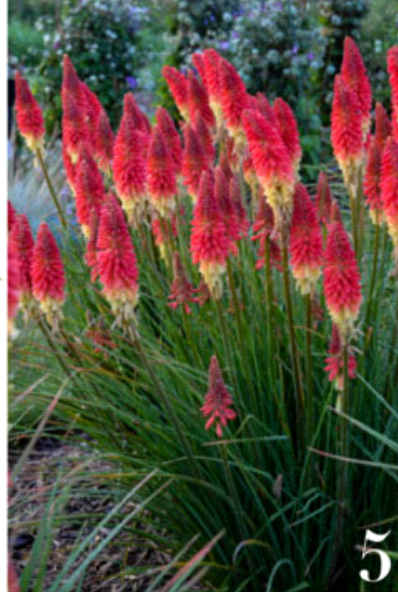
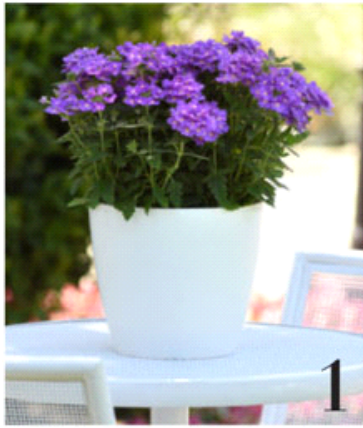
Origin Stories

Jennifer Polanz

Everyone loves a good origin story, whether it's Diana of Themyscira, T'Challa of Wakanda or classic, old-school Clark Kent (bonus points if you can name their superhero alter egos). That's why we're going full-on superhero this issue by highlighting the origin stories of some of the newest varieties to hit retail shelves next year.

On the *GrowerTalks* side of the magazine, my partner-in-crime Jen Zurko details the culture notes for some of those new varieties. On this side, we asked the breeders to talk a bit about their backstory, or in superhero universe language (DC or Marvel, we don't discriminate), their origin story.

Our reasoning? The more you know about them, the better you can craft a story with which to sell them. We also asked the breeders about these plants' superpowers, i.e. their disease resistance, better blooming time, heat tolerance—whatever it is that sets them apart and makes them special.



1. Ball FloraPlant: *Verbena Firehouse & Cadet Upright*

Our marketplace is hungry for verbena that will stay in flower all summer long and not die from mildew. The market accepted EnduraScape as a superior verbena, so we applied and strengthened our trial process to create the best verbena, and ultimately found Firehouse and Cadet Upright.

A strong trial process had to include regional locations, so we screened in Texas, Florida, California, Illinois, North Carolina, Michigan, Utah and Maryland. Both greenhouse production and consumer performance were considered in order to select the best-approved plants for our product launch. The end result of this trialed and approved process gave us Firehouse and Cadet Upright with summer-long flower performance AND powdery mildew performance in the garden.

—Kris Carlsson, Product & Launch Assortment Manager, Ball FloraPlant

2. Danziger: *Erysimum Sunstrong*

Sunstrong *Erysimum linifolium*—an early flowering perennial that blooms all summer—was the result of Danziger's breeding goals to develop plants that provide more color, more blooms and more solutions for growers and consumers. "We can't deliver a cold treatment in Israel, so we are selecting varieties that will flower without it," explains Mike Fernandez, Danziger North American Market Manager.

That's why the Sunstrong series does NOT require vernalization; it delivers flowers in the first year without a cooling period. It finishes faster and is ready earlier for growers. On the retail side, because it's an early and long bloomer, Sunstrong looks great on the retail shelf for a longer period of time. Sunstrong Bicolor Purple features large,

lavender blooms, while Sunstrong Orange offers tangerine-hued flowers with a delicate, fresh scent. Sunstrong also shows exceptional heat tolerance, which can increase a home gardener's success.

—Kathleen Hennessey, *Danziger*

3. Emerald Coast Growers: Amsonia Butterscotch

Amsonia hubrichtii Butterscotch, an Emerald Coast Growers exclusive, stands out from the species and from other amsonias for its resistance to tip die-back—that's why it was selected. Fans of blue star, as it's commonly known, will lament its tendency to develop darkened or brown foliage tips as it ages. Butterscotch doesn't, staying strong and colorful from stem to tip.

Added to that, Butterscotch offers high-impact visual appeal with vivid reddish stems contrasting against its rich, golden fall color. Forming upright, graceful mounds, it provides constant movement and texture in gardens and containers, and it has superior disease resistance as well.

—Joli Hohenstein, *Emerald Coast Growers*

4. PanAmerican Seed: Ornamental Pepper Hot Pops

The breeder, Marlin Edwards, always wanted to create something really new—not just improve existing types. For Hot Pops, he crossed freely between ornamental and edible peppers. Then he backcrossed, selfed and selected carefully for many pepper generations to get the exact plant he wanted. His background development for Hot Pops—the part before self-pollination and stabilization—often involved three to five independent crosses. A true labor of love!

While selecting his “dream plant,” Marlin also liked the look of the small, round fruit; it was different from anything on the market. Small fruit is strongly associated with smaller leaves and denser branching, so this filled the plant up nicely. The purple immature color of the Hot Pops fruit made the plant attractive weeks before it displayed its final orange-ripe color, saving the grower money and bench time, and giving the consumer more weeks of color in their garden.

—Ellen Leue, *Director of Vegetable Crops, PanAmerican Seed*

5. Proven Winners Perennials: Kniphofia Pyromania

Kniphofia (Red Hot Poker) as a genus naturally has a number of features that the majority of gardeners are looking for. It performs excellently through both heat and drought, and the grass-like foliage is unbothered by browsing deer and rabbits. Pyromania Kniphofia (six varieties debuted this year) were all chosen for their early blooming and numerous flower spikes. They're perennials with exceptional extended bloom and flower spikes that will appear until frost, which adds extra value to both growers and gardeners. The profusion of blooms and repeat bloom characteristic to this collection enhances their extended flowering quality.

Members of this collection also share a common intermediate height of 2.5- to 3-ft. tall. When the height is coupled with the flower power, this becomes an excellent perennial for those tending cutting or container gardens. Hardiness can often be a complaint about kniphofia, but after extensive trials, Pyromania survived reliably to Zone 6. Most will overwinter comfortably in 5b, but we recommend some form of winter protection for consistent performance the following year.

—Andrew Jager, *Marketing Specialist, Walter's Gardens*

6. Sakata: Begonia Senator iQ

Sakata breeders are always looking to improve and innovate. In this case, they aimed to create a complete series of bronze-leafed begonias with excellent performance for the young plant distributor, grower, retailer and consumer. Senator iQ represents a total upgrade of the original Senator series.

The young plant raiser benefits from high germination and uniform development. For the grower, early, uniform flowering across the series and uniform, non-stretching plant habit allows easy production in a wide range of pack and pot sizes. Good plant quality means better shelf life. The improved shelf life is also a big plus for the retailer, who also benefits from the retail appeal of the attractive plants with deep bronze foliage and contrasting, eye-catching flower pattern. In the garden, on the terrace or in the landscape, the consumer enjoys beautiful bicolor flowers in a continuous display, three seasons long.

—*Alecia Troy, Senior Marketing Manager, Sakata Seed America*

7. Suntory Flowers: Catharanthus Soiree Kawaii

Suntory Breeder Koichi Tomomatsu selected the Soiree Kawaii type of catharanthus because of its flower size, which is one-fourth smaller than the typical catharanthus. It's no coincidence, then, that Kawaii means "cute" in Japanese. "Kawaii can finish in small pots, which we cannot (do) with typical catharanthus," he says. "Customers can enjoy many applications with Kawaii, from small pot to landscape."

The smooth, glossy foliage also caught the breeder's eye, which should help catch the customer's eye, as well. Aside from its size, Soiree Kawaii also is low maintenance and provides a wide flower coverage due to its excellent branching and high density of flowers. It loves the heat, too, which makes it a great choice year-round for the South and a summer/late season annual for the North.

—*Delilah Onofrey, Suntory Flowers*