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## Inspiring the Influencers

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On a steamy August 22, Ball Horticultural Company hosted 16 consumer and garden media folks to spend the day in the Ball Gardens. Since I work in the building, Ball's Senior PR Manager Katie Rotella graciously invited me to tag along. Representatives from each of Ball's divisions were in their respective areas to talk about what will be new in garden centers in Spring 2024.

*Pictured: PanAmerican Seed's Marcus Jansen talking about pollinator gardening.*

Since everything started opening up after COVID, a handful of breeding companies have made it a point to hold special media day events, inviting consumer and trade editors to learn about their new varieties and even get a sneak peek into their new breeding programs. Ellen, Jen Polanz and I have been lucky enough to be invited to some of these events during the last couple of years, and it's always valuable and a great time.

Katie said that Ball has done informal media days in the past, where writers, photographers and social media influencers would be allowed to walk around and gather content. This year, they made it more of a formal event.

"We wanted to inspire them. We wanted to break things down by topic," said Katie. "And we wanted more of the 'plants are more than pretty' aspect of how they can share flowers with their audience. So it's not just, here are some new things and here are some color trends—it's here's how to take that Prism Pepper and turn it into a crudité plate."

Besides seeing what was new, attendees got to taste test many of the vegetables in PanAmerican Seed's Handpicked Vegetables program. They were also very enthusiastic when they saw the dozens of unique mixed combos, and got a special demonstration on creating a cut flower bouquet and container from Heather Ebl, who works in Ball's Supplier Relations Department, but has been a licensed florist for years. There was also a lovely luncheon in the pavilion and everybody tried their hand at watercolor painting at the end of the day.

This event allowed attendees access to new and unique content, while Ball's Marketing team saw short-term payoff like immediate posts on social media as well as long-term payoff of building relationships with the garden media. Traditionally, there's sometimes been a disconnect between the breeding companies and the consumer media.

Events like this allow both to bridge that gap. **GP**