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Cover Story

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New Stuff Consumers Will Crave

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California Spring Trials, aka “CAST”, has had a strong focus on retail appeal and sales concepts for years, but there’s recently been a shift from “displays” to “retail solutions.” The wow factor is still evident with big showcase pots and fewer bedding plant packs, but we’ve noticed (in the past four or five years) a shift toward seasonality and regionality in the messaging, too. Products are positioned based on when they can be shipped to stores and how they can be used to extend seasons (“shoulder-season” plants), or meet the demands of regional markets. The retail messaging seemed to be less about visual impact and more about the strategy—selling products in the best way at the best time.

Here are a few of our favorites from all the hundreds and hundreds of intros that we think are extra nice for independent garden centers.

Dahlia Labella (Beekenkamp)

The new intros fit right into their organized assortment of Labella Dahlias. The Medio series for 5- to 6-in. pots picks up Fun Flame (Fun indicating an unusual color or flower form); Maggiore for 8- to 10-in. pots gains Pomegranate (pictured); and Grande for gal.-sized pots gets new Coral. All of Beekenkamp’s Labella Dahlias are bred for strong stems, unique colors and six or seven flushes of new flowers.

Salvia Salgoon (HilverdaFlorist)

HilverdaFlorist introduced three new Salvia Salgoon, a hybrid of (we think) *S. guaranitica* and *S. splendens*. These are named for famous lakes of the world, such as Lake Como (light blue), Lake Flamingo (magenta) and Lake Blueberry (blue/violet). These are big, bold plants, even though they’re classified as “compact.”

Petunia Blue Diamond (Danziger)
Blue Diamond is a standalone petunia that didn't quite fit the Capella series, but was too pretty to ignore.

Petunia Designer Bridal Blush (Cohen)
Designer Bridal Blush is the ideal petunia for big hanging baskets. Cohen has been producing petunias from famous UK breeder David Kerley for years, and Designer Bridal Blush is a nice one, with large, slightly ruffled flowers in shades of pink from pale to dark.

Dahlia Hypnotica Candy Corn (Dümmen Orange)
It honestly has flower petals that look like the timeless and ubiquitous Halloween candy. And it fits right in with the rest of the medium-vigor Hypnotica series.

Petunia Surfinia Heavenly Blackberries & Cream (Suntory)
Surfinias are a mainstay for many growers with medium vigor and a mounding, trailing habit. Suntory adds new Blackberries & Cream with very dark purple centers that will pop on the retail bench.

Dianthus Electric Dreams (PlantHaven)
This dianthus from well-known breeder Whetman Pinks of the UK has a tidy habit and the flowers have an interesting, precise pattern.

Nemesia Escential Passionberry (PlantHaven)
PlantHaven has a series of nemesia aptly named (and spelled) Escential. This year, they're adding Passionberry. It has tricolor blooms with yellow and purple and a gold center and a strong, nice fragrance.

Calibrachoa MiniFamous (Selecta)
There were some new MiniFamous intros, like Uno (medium, compact) Funtopia Pink and Funtopia Blue (pictured), Ember Eclipse, Double Orange and Double Red, as well as the stunning Neo (medium vigor) Red Shuffle, with its vivid red petals with a yellow star and yellow flecks.



Calibrachoa Cha-Cha Electric Pink (Ball FloraPlant)
The Cha-Cha series of calibrachoas is 25% more vigorous in habit than Ball FloraPlant's flagship Cabaret. Electric Pink adds a vivid new color to the popular series featuring early flowering and cascading blooms.

Hydrangea Game Changer Giant Pink (Green Fuse)
This collection isn't brand new, but now the supply is built up and ready to go. Ready for 2025 is Giant Pink, with huge light pink blooms. We were impressed that from a direct-stuck liner, you growers-retailers can have 2-gal. pots ready for sale in nine weeks and huge baskets in 28 weeks. Since Game Changer is an interspecific cross, it has excellent drought tolerance, they said.

Agapanthus Blackjack (Plant Development Services, Inc.)

This tropical lily, bred in South Africa, has deep purple flowers that are almost black. It received international accolades when the Royal
Horticultural Society named it their Plant of the Year for 2023. It also makes a great patio tropical that's easy to overwinter in a garage or other cool, protected space.

Petunia Ovation Crimson Eye (Cohen)

Cohen's second new petunia introduction this year from David Kerley is Ovation Crimson Eye, a purply-red, ball-shaped variety with flower size and veining that looked just about perfect.



Petunia Painted Love (Syngenta)

Remember the song "Tainted Love"? Yep, now it's stuck in your head, too. Petunia Painted Love is a standalone and a standout. The color-changing grape tones with snow-white edges are variable, but beautiful, especially in baskets and big deco pots.

Petunia Damask (Syngenta)

The Damask Petunia series from Syngenta is a seed-raised multiflora group for large packs all the way up to hanging basket production—including 12 colors and a mix. Ideal for high-density production and rack shipping, Damask has excellent weather tolerance and shelf life.

Petunia SlingShot Heartwheel (Ball FloraPlant)

SlingShot is the "novelty" petunia collection from Ball FloraPlant—you might know some of the previous cool intros like Lemonberry and Black
Magic. New for this year is Heartwheel, with deep pink heart patterns on the edges of each bloom. Use this one in baskets and containers for
maximum interest.

Coleus Skeletal (Kientzler)

Another one that should be a Halloween hit, Skeletal features bone-like serrations on the two-tone red-and-yellow foliage. There have probably been (and still are) similar coleus forms on the market; Kientzler was smart enough to call it out with a clever name. **GP**