

Spring Trials: Day 1, from the Bobbleheads



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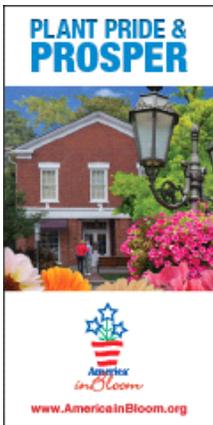
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NOT live from California ... but pretending to be

Chris: Hey, Ellen!

Ellen: Well, hey there, yourself, Bossman!

Chris: I've been waiting a year to say that. But alas, you and I are NOT broadcasting live from the California Spring Trials, thanks to that doggone coronavirus. And I was really looking forward to it this year, as the stops had been rearranged a little bit, and we were going to have a new Bobblehead, Bill Calkins, traveling with us. But instead, as everybody knows, Pack Trials, er, Spring Trials, was cancelled, so instead we've been compiling all the new variety photos and videos and information via modern digital tools, like webinars and Zoom meetings and Google Docs ... which is how we are compiling this newsletter.

Ellen: It's a bummer that Pack, er, I mean Spring, er actually I mean CAST was cancelled, but pandemics are no joke. COVID-19 has been the nastiest piece of non-living random DNA floating around for a very long time. It's a good thing we're all social distancing. In fact, I'd rather prefer if everyone keeps 6 feet from me from now on. I'll pretend I'm the Queen of England.

Chris: Let's see you wave (Ellen waves). Yup, you've got the wave down pat.

Now, about our efforts here, and in the next five *Acre*s of *Buzz* newsletters you're going to get: When we heard CAST was cancelled just days before it was set to open, we wanted to help all the breeders who had invested so much time and sweat and money into growing plants and creating displays. We thought that if we contacted them immediately, they could get us photos and maybe even video, then we'd do some sort of online interviews with them (thank you, Zoom) ... in other words, gather content just as if we were in their greenhouse in California.

And that's what we've been doing for the past two weeks. It's not the same—in fact, it's a whole lot harder—but it's our attempt to bring you the Spring Trials new variety information you need to run your business. Because once this whole thing is over, you're still going to need new varieties!

Ellen: It is a bunch harder—we don't see the actual plants, can't smell the fragrant ones, test their durability by knocking them off a bench. And my FitBit is mad at me for not moving 250 steps per hour, seeing as how I'm pinned to this chair. But I can put my pad of paper on a desk now and I can actually read my resulting notes. Bonus!

Chris: True! It's funny how often you'd have to ask me, "Chris, did I write 'compact plant' or 'companion plant'?" In reality, it looked like "carrot parcel."

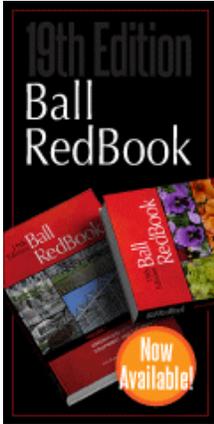
Ellen: Funny! Anyway, in our attempt at normalcy, we'll be presenting the information gathered via this year's non-traditional means as traditionally as possible. That means you'll be receiving six days of *Acre*s of *Buzz* containing content from the stops we would have made that day (really, the day before). For example, our first day's stop would have been all of the Ball Horticultural companies, so this first edition has all the Ball company stuff. Our second day of stops would have included Green Fuse, Suntory, PlantHaven, Westhoff and Schoneveld, so those are who and what you'll read about here tomorrow. At least, as much as possible. There's a lot going on in the world, and it's totally understandable if a company hasn't been able to send us information or slot a Zoom meeting with us. Don't worry, we'll put the information in some edition of a newsletter of some type.

Chris: Another change from the "real" *Acre*s of *Buzz*: as far as our actual writing process goes, we have to fudge there a bit, for time's sake. Ellen and I can do this back-and-forth Vaudeville routine easily in a hotel room office. It's not so easy when she's in Boston and I'm in Chicago



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and we have scores of demands on our time. So the fudge is, we are back-and-forthing our daily intros, but we will divide up the actual variety coverage to a single writer—I'll do two days, Ellen will do two, and returning Bobblehead Bill Calkins will do two.

Ellen: First exception—I call dibs on writing up the vegetable stuff. It's my (onion) jam, after all. And the topic is all the more important this year because of the modern "victory gardening" interest. The more you can grow at home, the less frequently you'll have to head out to the grocery store.

Chris: Happy to let you tackle the veggies, Ellen. I know you cringe when I tell you that Early Girl is my favorite tomato variety.

Okay, that said, I'm going to hit the highlights from Day 1, which are the Ball Companies, located at the company's PanAmerican Seed breeding facility in Santa Paula, about 20 minutes east of the pretty coastal town of Ventura.



The Ball Companies

Chris: Here, we always spend a full day because there are seven divisions to see, plus brands like Wave, covering seed annuals, vegetative annuals, seed perennials, vegetative perennials and vegetables. Plus, some potted plants thrown in for good measure.



Bee's Knees Petunia

I believe the No. 1 most-memorable intro from the whole trial has to be Bee's Knees Petunia from Ball FloraPlant. It's the richest, deepest yellow you'll find on a vegetative petunia. It's a stand-alone, not part of a series. Medium vigor, they say, with "terrific" garden performance. Check it out in [THIS VIDEO](#). We love the name, too! Easily remembered long after you first see the flower.

Also from Ball FloraPlant is a new series of calibrachoa called Cha-Cha. It's 25% more vigorous than Cabaret, their mid-sized series (Congo is their compact series), and was bred for big baskets and premium containers. It's early, and very uniform across the colors. The series starts with five colors: Deep Blue, Frosty Lemon, Tangerine, Diva Apricot and Diva Hot Pink (Diva indicates colors that change color).



Cha-Cha Calibrachoa

Other additions include bidens Sun Drop Double Yellow, which boasts flowers twice the size of standard bidens; and Calibrachoa Bumble Bee Orange, which joins the bicolored Bumble Bee collection. Oh, and five new multi-liner MixMasters, if you're looking for more easy combo planters.



From Selecta One and PAS

The big eye-catcher from Ball's other vegetative annual brand, Selecta One, was a trio of new Sky Petunias—you know, the ones with the flowers that look like a starry sky? Headliner

Petunia (their mounding series) gets Crystal Sky—a lavender veined flower with spots—and Electric Purple Sky. Main Stage Petunia (their vigorous trailing series) gets the extra-unique Glacier Sky. It's like the original Night Sky with the addition of a white rim. Check out [THIS VIDEO](#) for a better look at them.



Main Stage Glacier Sky Petunia

Also new from Selecta One: Giselle Phlox, which gets four new colors, including the class-important Red. These are early, compact, uniform and take the heat. They even showed them in baskets, so they're versatile, too. The series now has eight colors. And as for their multi-liner program, Trixi's, there are six new ones and an upgrade.

On to seed annuals, where PanAmerican Seed wanted to wow visitors with one of the most interesting Wave Petunias to date, Shock Wave Purple Tie Dye, which features purple and white flowers with varying patterns. Shock Waves are mounding and spreading like Easy Waves, but with smaller flowers, which gives them even better weather resistance. They're also extra early. See it in [THIS VIDEO](#). Also new in Wave is Easy Wave Rose Fusion.



Shock Wave Purple Tie-Dye Petunia

A new series is F1 African Marigold Marvel II, an upgrade to the old Marvel series, being a week faster to flower under long days. It's 20% larger than their Taishan series, growing 16- to 18-in. tall, with 3-in. blooms. Comes in Gold, Orange, Yellow and a Mixture.

And we can't forget about Beacon, arguably PanAmerican's most important series. It gets a color addition, Rose, bringing the series to seven colors and two mixes. Naturally, it sports the same "high resistance" to Impatiens Downy Mildew of the rest of the series. Oh, they told us the series now has coated seed, making it easier to sow.



What about perennials?

Darwin, Ball's vegetative perennial company, is offering up a new Spanish lavender called Primavera that they think could change the class because of its long bloom time. Regular Spanish (*stoechas*) lavenders bloom April to June. Primavera is said to bloom from February to October! It's hardy in Zones 7 to 9.

We liked Darwin's new nepeta series for its name: Whispurr. (It's a catmint—get it?) The two colors, Blue and Pink, have super large flowers for a good show in the landscape.



Whispurr Nepeta

Over on the seed perennial side of things, Kieft Seed has a groundbreaking new echinacea series called the Artisan Collection. It's the first F1 hybrid echinacea collection in the market. What's that mean? Better plant structure, with lots of branching. Better uniformity of flowers among the colors. And colors! Individual ones! The collection starts with two, Red Ombre and Soft Orange. Seed quality is excellent, too, with 85% minimum germination. Watch [THIS VIDEO](#) to see what Bob Ross, er, I mean Kris Carlsson thinks about it.



Artisan Collection of F1 echinacea

Kieft also introduced the F1 Aquilegia Earlybird series, an improvement over the Songbird series. Bred in Costa Rica, Earlybird is earlier, as the name implies, needing only five weeks of vernalization and a low cold requirement, for growing in warmer winter climates. The series is also more uniform in habit across the colors. Flowers are large and upward-facing. Eight colors, including six bicolors and a mixture.

Hey, Ellen, how about you dive in now and give us some veggie highlights from Burpee?



How hot is hot? Armageddon-hot!

Ellen: Oh hey, veggies! I'll start with the variety that I don't think I'd be so happy eating and that would be Armageddon F1 pepper. From the name you have a hint at its potency. The Devil himself might not even dare to eat this one, with a 1.3 million Scoville rating. But there are plenty of folks out there who do love the fierieness of such a pepper. Did I mention it's the first super hot F1 hybrid pepper? They say to think of it as an improved Carolina Reaper, with hybrid vigor that means faster to fruit—and lots of them. It's been on the market since the middle of last year and it's selling well. Jayson Force's comment about the introduction are words I've never thought I'd hear: "We're very excited about Armageddon."



F1 Armageddon Pepper

Chris: I did laugh at that! But I'm with you, I'm keeping my social distance with that one.

Ellen: For those of you like me and Chris who are not excited about extremely hot heat levels in peppers, Burpee is introducing the Sweet Poppers Jalapeño, giving folks a sweeter alternative to a traditional jalapeño when creating cheese-filled poppers (or any jalapeño application, really).

What could possibly be new in the world of cabbage? Burpee has two this year! First up is Sweet Slaw. It's quite distinctive with its cone-shaped head—better to grab for those of us with smaller hands, plus it hides a short core. So there's more tasty stuff for slicing into slaw and sauerkraut. Second, Sweet Thang Cabbage. It's a smooth-leaved, non-heading cabbage, sometimes called a Portuguese kale. Use it like kale or collards, in fact, and in the case of Sweet Thang, you can even eat the veins—they're big, but not tough and fibrous.



Wrapping up with Ball Ingenuity

Chris: Thanks for those veggie highlights, Ellen. I'll wrap up Day 1 with the Ball division that features varieties NOT bred by Ball: Ball Ingenuity. They introduced three:

First, Brew-Tea-Ful, an actual tea plant—*Camellia sinensis*—from which you can harvest leaves

and brew your own tea. It's a Zone 7 plant that likes full sun and moist soil. In fact, it doesn't like to dry out, so while it can be grown in a patio container, make sure it's in a rich mix that will hold some water. It will be available as liners and 4-in. pots.

Next, Philodendron Shangri-La, a compact split-leaf philodendron that's dense and clumping rather than climbing. Nice for the houseplant trend!



Philodendron Shangri-La

Lastly, the one potted plant from Ball I'll mention—a new Cyclamen series from Morel called Metalis. As the name implies, it's got metallic-silver foliage. Good for 4- to 5-in. pots, the series has six colors and a mix.

Ellen: Well, everybody, that's Day 1 of coverage of an event that never happened and so didn't have a Day 1. How'd we do? Make you think we were actually there? Send Bossman Beytes an email and let him know at beytes@growertalks.com.

Chris: Oh sure, let me take all the heat! Well, the best thing is, it's not midnight, which is when we usually finish our writing. My clock shows 12:36 p.m. Okay, tomorrow is Day 2, which will feature two stops and five companies. Watch your inbox and thanks for reading!



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