

Features

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Spring Trials An Eye Toward Retail

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We at *Green Profit* walk each Spring Trials display with an eye toward you, the retailer. Which plants will be showcased and used as only an independent garden center can? Can this new edible variety inspire the foodie chefs walking through their local stores? Will retailers be inspired themselves by putting their own twists on this display?

While Spring Trials has more exhibitors and locations than ever, we kept careful notes on common themes and general trends. What did we notice? Well, it sure did seem like the Year of the Pepper (that was 2015, according to the NGB). It was also a great year for color and component plants. And while the number of exhibitors going all out with retail-ready marketing displays has dwindled, the ones we spotted could get you sketching out new concepts for your nursery yard asap.

Well, enough talk! Let's get to it.

There's plenty more to come in the August issue of *GrowerTalks*, in which we'll discuss perennials, shrubs, items that mistakenly fell off our lists and things that struck us as interesting from the 2017 Spring Trials!

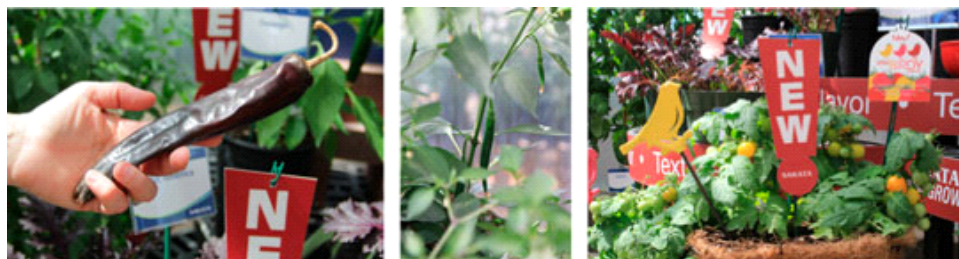
Incredible Edibles



Take 2 Director's Cut Pepper Combination (Burpee)—Last year Burpee introduced the space-saving Take 2 tomato combinations, pairing up one indeterminate tomato with one bush-style tomato. This year the Take 2 combos get a pair of peppers. Director's Cut combines Tangerine Dream and Lemon Dream peppers, producing orange and yellow sweet-but-lightly-spicy peppers in a compact container.

Dragon Roll Shishito Pepper (Burpee)—Taking the heat level up a notch, Burpee also introduced Dragon Roll, a pepper that has been popular in Japan as bar snack. Serve blistered over high heat and with a touch of salt and it becomes a tasty accompaniment to an adult beverage. About one in 10 peppers is more than slightly spicy. And at just over two months until harvest, these 3- to 5-in. peppers produce a long time.

Aji Rico F1 Hot Pepper (PanAmerican Seed)—A vigorous hybrid pepper appropriate for in-ground gardening, Aji Rico is bred to have a high yield and early ripening. The 3- to 4-in. conical-shaped fruits ripen in about 55 days to a mature green and in 70-75 days to a mature red. The citrusy flavor is unique and the splash of heat this thin-walled variety provides is lovely whether eaten fresh or slightly cooked. It's an AAS winner so it must be great!



Durango and Crackle Peppers (Sakata)—Each year Sakata dives into its vast commercial vegetable varieties to offer our industry some great veggies for the retail market. Both peppers they introduced this year have a bit of heat to them. A guajillo-type pepper growing to about 6- to 8-in., Durango's red flesh turns chocolaty in appearance when dried. Sakata's Crackle pepper, a Thai-type, is perfect for either fresh or dried uses and packs a mild punch at 3000-6000 Scoville units. Each plant produces loads of 4- to 5-in. fruits all season.

Little Birdy Cherry Tomatoes (Sakata)—Red Robin, Yellow Canary and Rose Finch are the three varieties in Sakata's Little Birdy series of cherry tomatoes (see what they did with the names there?). All three are dwarf determinate plants that, while fine on their own, make a compelling and colorful combo basket. Perfect for the patio.



Super Dwarfs Patio Tomatoes (Plug Connection)—Several years ago Plug Connection wowed us with their larger-than-life Mighty 'Mato grafted tomatoes. This year they've unveiled the "dwarf" version. Bigger than

your average dwarf, these Super Dwarfs combine the smaller determinate stature (30 to 36 inches) with the continuous fruiting of an indeterminate plant. With eight varieties to choose from, these give consumers a range of habits, flavors and colors.

Quattro Allium (PRUDAC)—Not every new veg was a pepper or tomato. Some were quite out of the ordinary, such as the Quattro, the culinary allium from PRUDAC. With the taste of fresh chive, you can pick off bits of the plant to top soup, or even sprinkle bits of the flowers onto a salad. It fits nicely into a kitchen garden program.

***Mertensia maritima* and *Oxalis tuberosum* (Histil)**—You can depend on the Israeli company Histil to come up with some outside-the-box edibles. Picking just two from this year's bunch, there's *Mertensia maritima*, a leafy green that tastes like oysters (we tried it!). Use fresh or cook it. The next is a fingerling potato-like tuber called *Oxalis tuberosum* Crimson & Gold selected by renowned Irish breeder company Fitzgerald Nurseries. Looks like an ornamental oxalis upstairs, but downstairs it's a tuber waiting to be cooked. High in Vitamins B, C and iron.

Ideal for Indies



Rex Begonia Shadow King Spearmint and Strawberry Sherbet (Green Fuse)—Part of Green Fuse's Lifestyle Plants, the Shadow Kings offer an amazing array of colors, textures and patterns that can be used both indoors and out. The two new stunners in this series of compact, shade-loving plants are Spearmint and Strawberry Sherbet.

***Corydalis Hillier Porcelain Blue* (PlantHaven)**—Had we seen Porcelain Blue a day previously, we would surely have thought it was the best April Fool's joke ever. After all, how can that color blue possibly exist in nature? Not only is this an amazingly colorful plant, it's a corydalis that battles beautifully through high heat and humidity, holds itself high in full sun, flowers six months out of the year and "doesn't go wonky in the middle," as these Brits say.



Cyperus A Lil In Da Nile and Senecio Crushed Velvet (Hort Couture)—Combo component plants mean the world for an independent garden center, as they let you get creative. Like these two from Hort Couture. The cyperus lends the height a combo container craves, while the senecio Crushed Velvet bring cool color, a fun texture and that mid range height necessary for a creative container combination.

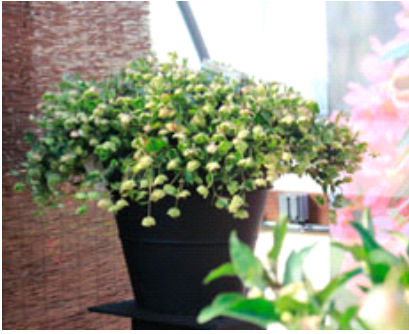


Mentha Jessica's Sweet Pear (Histil)—Another superb combo container component: a mint believe it or not! This plant has the upright habit of a tidy component plant, and, unlike a typical mint, it's not vigorous and bullying.

Nasturtium Orchid Flame (Thompson & Morgan)—Add this item into the “great for combos” category. Lending a container that all-important spiller factor, Orchid Flame does stay rather compact at 12 inches. The color is pretty cool, too, starting out red and turning yellow.



Thunbergia Arizona colors (Jaldety)—Lovely on its own or in a combination, thunbergias have come into their own both at the breeder level and at retail. They are hot items. To meet the growing demand for something new, Jaldety continues to reveal some beyond-the-norm (i.e. other than yellow) colors in the Arizona series: Pink Beauty, Rose Sensation, White Halo and Glow Orange.



Hellebore Winterbells (Hilverda Kooij)—Hellebores are another up-and-coming plant on the independent scene. Winterbells promises to be a good seller because it's an earlier bloomer. Sell as a pot plant, then encourage folks to plant in spring. It'll continue blooming for another seven months. Its heat tolerance helps ensure it'll stick around for several more seasons of blooms.

Helping You Sell



#LetsAskAmy (Bailey Nurseries)—Getting help with your yard and garden can be as simple asking “Amy” via an online form or through Facebook and Instagram. Who’s Amy? “Amy” represents an average home-owning woman who has taught herself what she needs to know through a variety of landscaping projects. She’s portrayed online and on POP as an open, friendly and relatable person—someone who you wouldn’t mind asking for advice. This program from Bailey allows consumers to submit questions to #LetsAskAmy, and “Amy”—an actual garden expert working behind the scenes—will respond with an answer within 24 hours.

A Blooming Banquet (Hort Couture)—Benches filled with pots are basic. Step up your style retail game with a banquet table. Hort Couture’s burlap-covered table display was an eye-catching way of displaying each new variety as a plated “meal.” They had removed a pot-sized circle of the table under each place setting, then inserted the featured plant so it was flush with the table. Add fancy chairs and “chandelier” of hanging plants to really wow customers and draw their attention to where you want it to be.



Pure Blooms (Florist)—Florist's Pure Blooms display was created as an example of a way to draw attention to a message that may be overlooked by piecemeal signage. In this case, the message related to the ability of gerberas and all plants to clean indoor air, and the bench of uniformly sleeved pots screamed, "Take me home and let me do the job!"



Targeted Retail Displays (Dümmen Orange)—Ideally retail displays will draw attention to and solve the problems of a targeted audience of potential purchasers. Dümmen Orange's three retail displays certainly did just that: Grab & Gro DIY container items for those wanting to do the work but needing some instruction; Kinder Garden containers with big, beautiful child-friendly blooms; and Savor the Flavor edibles for the inspired patio-to-table chef. **GP**