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companion coverage

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Pack Trials Part II



Lavender, agastache and plectranthus, oh my!
Some of the many great things I saw at this year's Pack Trials.

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Top to bottom: Barcelona series lavender; agastache 'Acapulco Salmon & Pink'; opposite, top to bottom: impatiens 'Fusion Sunset'; plectranthus 'Silver Shield'. (All photos courtesy of Rick Schoellhorn)

We are continuing with the Pack Trials coverage from last month, and there are some new and "second servings" releases I wanted to highlight in this issue. Most of these plants are quite unique, but as a group I think they offer some really great potential for high-quality mixed containers and upper-end color due to either their flower or foliage qualities.

LAVENDER

As we mentioned last month this was a good year for lavender at Pack Trials, with a lot of new plant material and some big advances in trials and displays. One of the locations that really stood out was Bodger Botanicals. There were some changes in the organization of layout that really did a great job of highlighting new releases and additions to existing series.

Bodger has assembled a strong group of Spanish lavender cultivars with a complete color range from rose to white and blue through lavender into deep lavender. It was great to see the comprehensive display of both the Barcelona and Madrid series. The Madrid series is a bit larger and includes Purple, Pink, Midnight (a deep purple) and White. Both Pink and White are a bit less vigorous than Purple and Midnight. The Barcelona series includes a pink, purple, rose, and white. In this series the pink appears to be more compact than the other colors.

The Spanish lavenders as a group are a bit showier than traditional lavender, with prominent petals atop each flower spike. Spanish lavender makes excellent value-added 4-inch and 1-gal. color and also adds a lot of color to mixed container plantings of herbs.

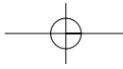
AGASTACHE

While we are speaking of mixed containers of herbs, the other really nice series from Bodger was its agastache Acapulco series. These came out last year, and we have trialed them for two years in Florida; I am really impressed with these plants! The series includes three colors and comes out of the Kieft genetics program. Agastache Acapulco has three colors: Salmon- & Pink, Orange and Rose. All three are a totally different breed (*Agastache cana*) than the more upright agastache/anise hyssop types (*Agastache foeniculum*). These plants carry masses of pastel toned flowers and resemble salvia more than agastache. 'Heather Queen' is one of the older industry cultivars, but in our trials Heather Queen was slower to flower and less desirable for container production. A bonus to these brightly colored introductions is their foliage fragrance — minty and a little reminiscent of 'Rose Geranium'. Great plants and tough as well!

EXOTIC IMPATIENS

Ball FloraPlant's displays were awesome as usual, but it was the Fusion





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series of impatiens that caught my eye. The Fusion series is an interspecific cross (meaning it is a cross between two species) — a bit of an accomplishment in itself — but the reward is a group of impatiens that look like normal bedding impatiens but flower in yellow and orange tones with cupped flowers. It is a uniform series and really looks nice in either baskets or mixed containers. The Fusion series includes Radiance, Sunset, Glow, Heat and Infrared. Because of the genetics involved in this cross, expect the flowers to be presented both above and below the foliage. Over-fertilizing can accentuate the problem, so watch your fertility! Even though I am not generally an orange flower fanatic, I think the Sunset cultivar had the strongest color presentation.

PLECTRANTHUS

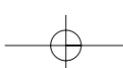
While we are discussing Ball I wanted to make a quick note of some introductions from PanAmerican Seed. They have released plectranthus 'Silver Shield', which is a great new seed-produced form of this traditionally vegetative crop. There is so much give and take between the seed and vegetative sides of our industry that when someone takes a vegetative crop and gets the breeding program in place to produce them by seed I feel it definitely worthy of note; this is one of those cases.

Plectranthus argentatus (the species that Silver Shield arises from) is a large horsy silver-foliaged form and a great landscape plant for hot areas of the United States. Silver Shield is true to type but with a stronger silver color to the foliage and better basal branching than traditional cutting stock. This plant has a strong place in 1-gal., 4-inch and large mixed container production, but beware, it will overgrow less vigorous plants quickly, so match it up with vegetative petunias and other high-vigor crops if you are doing mixed container work. We haven't tested Silver Shield for plant growth regulator responses, but most plectranthus respond well to less than .06-.25

ppm paclobutrazol drenches, and with this kind of a crop, you may want to experiment a bit with liner drenches to control the early-season stretch.

GERANIUMS

When I lived in California, Colorado and Alaska geraniums were such a mainstay crop of the summer months; I really hated to lose them from the plant palette when I moved to Florida. So, it was really nice to see such a unique geranium introduced at Pack Trials this year. Oglevee's





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'Indian Dunes' geranium was really an astounding color blend — chartreuse green foliage and a bold rusty marking in the center of each leaf with coral/salmon blooms. This hybrid is a mixed container dream, providing texture and color in one plant. Vigorous and easy, this geranium really stands out in 4-inch to 1-gal. containers, as well as larger pots. Very striking and also plays well with fall coloring so it could be used again in fall containers and displays.



EUPHORBIA

Proven Winners' 'Diamond Frost' euphorbia is a completely unique plant on the market. It is a novelty plant but will be a durable mixed container addition, providing a mounding to trailing habit and masses of white bracts that gives the effect of baby's breath but with a better shape for mixed containers. Until this release, I have always thought of euphorbia as a coarse-textured plant, but Diamond Frost is a very delicate plant that will work well in 4-inch, baskets and mixed containers. It has held up well in Florida's heat and humidity, which really expands its season and area of performance. Definitely give this one a shot if you are looking for signature items.

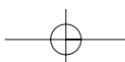


TORENIA

Suntory's displays are always impressive, and we talked about lophospermum in the June issue. I wanted to go back to Suntory for a look at 'Summer Wave Lavender Blue' torenia. We are getting accustomed to the three main vegetative colors in torenia (amethyst, blue and pink), but this Lavender Blue is a really striking new color. It is also doing well in our trials. The vegetative torenia are such versatile plants and are well suited to all container sizes for production and mixed container use. This new color will be a great addition to the existing market for this crop. Make sure to check out Danziger's new Moon



Top to bottom: geranium 'Indian Dunes'; euphorbia 'Diamond Frost'; torenia 'Summer Wave Lavender Blue'; cordyline 'Red Star'; senecio 'Kilimanjaro' and 'Himlaya'.



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Series as well as PanAmerican's Lemon Drop release as well for some other great torenia.

CORDYLINE

Lastly, I wanted to cover a few of Twyford's releases and congratulate them on creating a really incredible display area this year. They transformed a small field into an intimate garden and filled it with some incredible new plant material! The first group I wanted to discuss is the cordyline. Last year I did an article on the Ti Plants (*Cordyline fruticosa*), and now we are going to be focusing on hybrids of *Cordyline australis* or *Dracaena indivisa* — taxonomists argue which is which — a.k.a. "The Spike" dracaena.

Now...don't think you know all there is to know about these plants, and don't let your images of the old-fashioned spike dracaena affect your better judgment. Yes, these were overused a few years ago, but the new releases are so awesome they will win you over again. While we were growing only the simple green form, plant nerds in other parts of the world were collecting red, bronze, lavender/purple and variegated forms of these plants. Get ready because the new forms are going to start the whole thing over again. These plants are practically the perfect upright accent plant for a mixed container; they are surprisingly cold and heat hardy and just about bullet proof.

Twyford has two releases 'Red Star' and 'Sundance'. Red Star has solid bronze-burgundy-toned foliage (again think mixed containers and fall sales), while Sundance is a green-leaved, red-toned mid-vein form. Both are vigorous and striking alone or in mixed containers. Remember, these plants all hate perlite, so avoid high perlite mixes for best foliage quality, and plan for a fairly slow crop unless you buy pre-finished, especially in cold climates, but also plan to sell out — these plants are so cool! We'll be focus-trialing this group of plants in our spring 2005 field trials here in Florida.

SENECIO

I'm out of space but also wanted to mention Fides North America's Senecio 'Himalaya' and 'Kilimanjaro'. Both are killer fine-textured succulents for succulent collections or mixed containers. Long spike-shaped leaves with green (Himalaya) or gray (Kilimanjaro) foliage, these are specimen plants in their own right and will thrive in hot, dry climates or locations where it is normally too dry for traditional color. It was so great to see someone bringing in these plants, definitely look into them if you are looking for something different! 

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For more information on the varieties discussed in this article, direct your inquiries to the following companies.

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