

# MARKETING YOUR GREEN GOODS

Bench talkers, printed pots, color coding — there's a lot more to selling plants these days than just putting some flats on a bench, and last year's Pack Trials can give you a glimpse of what's ahead.



By Bridget White

Every April, the major U.S. plant breeders sponsor a 2-week event known collectively as the California Pack Trials. Growers, retailers and press from around the world traverse the Pacific coast during this time, marveling at the best the industry has to offer. Begun as a growing trial comparing like varieties from different companies, the California Pack Trials has evolved into an industry event showcasing the new varieties that will be available the following growing season.

If you are looking for the hottest new or improved varieties coming to the market, this is the place to be. But if two weeks sounds like a long time to be away from the shop, take a look at some of the varieties on the following pages, as this section features some of the notable varieties from the Pack Trials.

## A FEW WORDS ABOUT VARIETIES

It's always hard to say x bedding plant is going to be hot this year. Let's face it: impatiens have long-since ceased to be exciting — for the grower, the retailer and for the consumer. Nonetheless, there were many new bedding plant introductions at the 2001 Pack Trials. New colors, new mixes and a few new lines made for enough introductions to keep the bedding plant category interesting.

Want to know what's really hot? Take a look at your sales trends the past few years. Selling a lot more vegetative material? A lot more perennials? Well then it will come as no surprise that these categories had many more introductions than in years past. Hoping to capitalize on the diversity needed for those popular mixed containers, many companies have added entirely new lines of old favorites like coleus and baby's breath. You can expect to see these new introductions translate into a wider variety of plant material in mixed baskets and containers and in many more "unusual" plants for the hard-to-please among your clientele.

## THE MARKETING TREND

With over 600 new varieties, mixes and improvements at last year's California Pack Trials, you might be surprised to hear that the biggest trend last year had nothing to do with color or form or even variety. While breeders were busy producing new variety introductions, their PR people were even

busier producing new packaging and marketing materials designed for those plants. In fact, the most consistent theme at every stop was how to grab consumers' attention, how to lure them over to the bench, how to sell more plants.

Proven Winners has the longest track record with patented plant material and branded signs and tags, but recent announcements indicate that Ball's Simply Beautiful line and the Flower Fields line from Paul Ecke Ranch, Yoder Brothers, Fischer and Goldsmith, are on the verge of launching aggressive consumer marketing campaigns via signage, POP materials, and print and TV ads.

Many garden centers have expressed some reluctance about promoting any brand other than their own, and this new wave of marketing materials seems to acknowledge this concern, with less emphasis on the variety or company. For



example, while the new Simply Beautiful signage is not without the line's logo, the focus is on "the gardening lifestyle." The message is that gardeners have better, less-hectic lives than non-gardeners. A gardener's idea of a morning workout is watering her flowers and her afternoon drive is taken with a wheel barrow.

It might be that the marketing trend has shifted away from "how to sell more of my plants" to "how to sell more plants, period," but it is still way too early to make this prediction yet. What is certain is that breeder-developed marketing programs are an ever-increasing part of the green goods category.

## USING THE MATERIAL

So The Flower Fields sent you an "Ad Agency in a Box" and Proven Winners aired commercials on your local HGTV station. How can you use these programs to increase your sales?

The first step is documenting which breeders' lines you carry and what marketing programs they offer. Then you can decide either how those programs fit in with what you are already doing or which of those programs you want to adopt in your nursery. For example, if you have always been a big proponent of color and you already carry Fischer's Sonic New Guineas, you can look into the Flower Fields' color chipping program, which helps consumers choose coordinating colors for the plants in their gardens.

—It's that simple. Yes, there is a wide variety of marketing material available, especially when you consider that many of next year's pots will be printed and most plants will have at least one branded tag. Your



challenge is to sort through what is offered and choose the message you