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Suffering to Bring You More Flowers

Posted by Steve Bender, April 16, 2010 in Annuals and Perennials



My commitment to you is true and unwavering -- neither sun nor wave nor ocean breeze will stop Grumpy from reporting on the best of what's new to the gardening public.

And so this week I undertook an arduous 2,000 mile journey by air to Ventura, California to visit the 2010 plant trials of Ball Horticultural Company, one of the country's largest and most respected wholesale producers of annuals, perennials, and shrubs. I was forced to accept deluxe accommodations at a beach front hotel with nothing to look at but the sun rising over miles of the Pacific Ocean. Oh, the agony!

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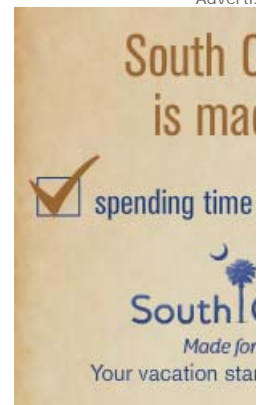
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However, steeled by a fortuitous cocktail hour, I escaped said prison and made my way to the plant trials, where I was amazed by colors nearly as brilliant as Grumpy himself arranged in a very artistic way. Instead of just lining out plants in a field, Ball had created a series of garden rooms that reminded me of many of the best garden centers I've been to. You not only got to see flowers, but get great ideas how to use them. Here are a few of the new plants I expect to make a splash in the very near future. Look for them in local garden and home centers.



'Black Velvet' petunia-- Just the thing Morticia Addams would have loved, this petunia really is black. Combine this flower with an innocent young girl and a sensitive yet sensual vampire and you have all the makings of a hit movie women will see 247 times at \$11 a pop.

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Callibrachoa 'MiniFamous Double Amethyst'-- Why can't the hort industry get together and come up with an acceptable common name for Callibrachoa? No one can pronounce it (it's cally-brack-O-uh), so how can people ask for it? One company calls theirs "Million Bells," but apparently that's a trademark. Maybe we should just call them "baby petunias," because that's what they look like.

Covered with 1-inch blooms, callibrachoa offer colors petunias don't -- like good yellows, oranges, salmon, and terracotta. They do great in containers and in the ground, as long as the soil is well drained. This MiniFamous line has performed exceptionally well in the University of Georgia trials, blooming continuously in the hot, humid summer. I love the look of 'Double Amethyst' -- like a little, purple rose.



'Bonfire' begonia -- If you don't think of begonias as tough plants, you haven't met this one. Forming a mound up to 36 inches tall and wide, it takes heat and drought and smothers itself from spring to fall with an absolute profusion of red-orange blooms. No, you can't leave it outside in winter in freezing weather, but you can't leave your in-laws out there either, even if you want to.



"Plentifall" pansy -- I think this one is going to be a big hit. It's the first trailing pansy -- a single plant can spread 18 inches. It's perfect for spilling over the edges of containers, as you see above, but it's also quite effective when planted in solid sweeps in the ground. Another plus -- it's extremely cold-hardy. So you won't have to settle for plants turned to mush by early winter freezes. In the South, this one should bloom all winter. Look for it this fall.

Well, time to head back to the hotel for more buffeting sea breezes and unrelenting beauty. Why, oh Lord, hast thou forsaken me?

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Comments

You are breaking my heart! Poor Grump! I am going to my room and cry now.

Posted by: Jean | April 17, 2010 at 03:16 AM