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# Trip to Chicago's Ball Seed is Gardener's Delight

Wholesale seed company offers a bounty of ideas for the hobby horticulturalist.

By [Peggy Bahrmasel](#) [Email the author](#) | August 2, 2011

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*(Editor's note: This article has been corrected from an earlier version. Ball Seed no longer owns Burpee Seed Company.)*

Have you ever heard of Ball Seed? Odds are probably not but I'd bet you've heard of a plant called Wave® Petunia, or the Bonanza Marigold or maybe even Super Elfin or Dazzler Impatiens. Ball Seed Company is committed to bringing fresh colors, new varieties and new life to old favorite plants. Bigger blooms, better uniformity and better, disease-resistant plants are researched and tested for several years by dedicated breeders and technicians before introducing them to you.

Ball Seed is not sold directly to consumers, but to growers who in turn grow and sell the plants to retail garden centers for consumers to purchase and plant in their own yards.

Last week I had the wonderful opportunity to visit the gardens and field trial beds at Ball Seed, located just west of Chicago, Illinois. They hosted their annual open house for growers and retail stores to see the latest plants that we will be seeing at garden centers in the upcoming years. We were shown their new lab facility where seeds are developed and tested to ensure excellent quality and viability of each seed.

This was my first trip to the Ball Seed field trial open house and I was expecting to see rows upon rows of new plants that are being tested. There was some of that but much of the area was also set up as a botanical garden showing displays of plants in a garden setting that you can re-create in your own yard.

There were examples of plant combinations, colors, sizes, textures and growing conditions everywhere you looked. I was really impressed and had no idea how large this company really is. Don't let the size of the company fool you because it is still family owned and everyone cares more about the quality of their products than the bottom line. Anna Ball, the CEO and President of her family's company greeted everyone personally as they entered the gardens.

There were demonstrations of container plant combinations using many of their new plants. Their website shows examples of their proven combinations that you can see and copy for your own planters.

Help is available to help you design your own combinations. Check out their website at [www.ballhort.com/combo](http://www.ballhort.com/combo), to see photos and plant lists of their innovative plant combinations. After you reach their site type into the search box "container combos," then select "Ballflora Plant New Mixed Container Program." A page will come up showing the newest container combinations.

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Garden System. Their website is still under construction at [www.sagebotanicmedia.com](http://www.sagebotanicmedia.com), but you can contact Cathy Rotstein at [catrotstein@sageall.com](mailto:catrotstein@sageall.com) for more information about these living walls.

A second wall method is called Woolly Pocket, in which pockets made of recycled plastic plant pots are attached to a wall and filled with soil and plants. Their website is [www.woollypocket.com](http://www.woollypocket.com).

Both of these types of living walls require a drip irrigation system for watering. So now you have another choice for covering your large brick wall or creating a privacy wall near your patio or pool that is covered with plants instead of brick, wood, or vinyl.

Plant walls give the environment a cool feel as opposed to brick that holds in heat. Have you ever sat next to a brick wall that has had the sun beating down on it all day? It's like sitting next to a heater radiating heat back onto you. But sitting next to a wall of plants with water has a cooling effect both physically and aesthetically.

This is a tall, narrow structure that can be used in limited spaces where tall shrubs won't work. The only downside to these walls is that the plants used are annuals and need to be changed out every summer since they won't survive our winters. But if you love tropical plants, you can place the wall inside your home and fill with tropical plants like Caladiums, Ferns, Philodendron, Begonias, Impatiens and have them growing year round inside. They are vertical walls that can be placed against existing walls so they don't take up any floor space. Visit each of these websites and find out which system works best for you.

Unfortunately not all of Ball Seed plants are found in your local garden center which typically carry the most common annuals and perennials that are the best sellers. But if there is a new plant you have heard about, don't hesitate to call around to different garden centers to find it. Someone will have it and if not they may order it for you.

Check out the photos of the plant walls and the many container plant combinations. These should get you started thinking about next years containers and bedding plants.

*If you are interested in gardening, learning about gardening or joining a garden club, stop by the Community Association Clubhouse, the second Monday morning of each month and sit in on a meeting of the Jardin du Lac Garden Club. Meetings start at 9:30 a.m.*

*If you have a beautifully landscaped yard or have unique garden ornaments that you are proud of and would like to see featured on Patch.com, or have any gardening questions, contact Peggy at [Bahrmasel@msn.com](mailto:Bahrmasel@msn.com).*

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