

In September, visitors converged at River Farm and five other sites to preview the hottest new plant introductions for 2006.

BY AHS STAFF



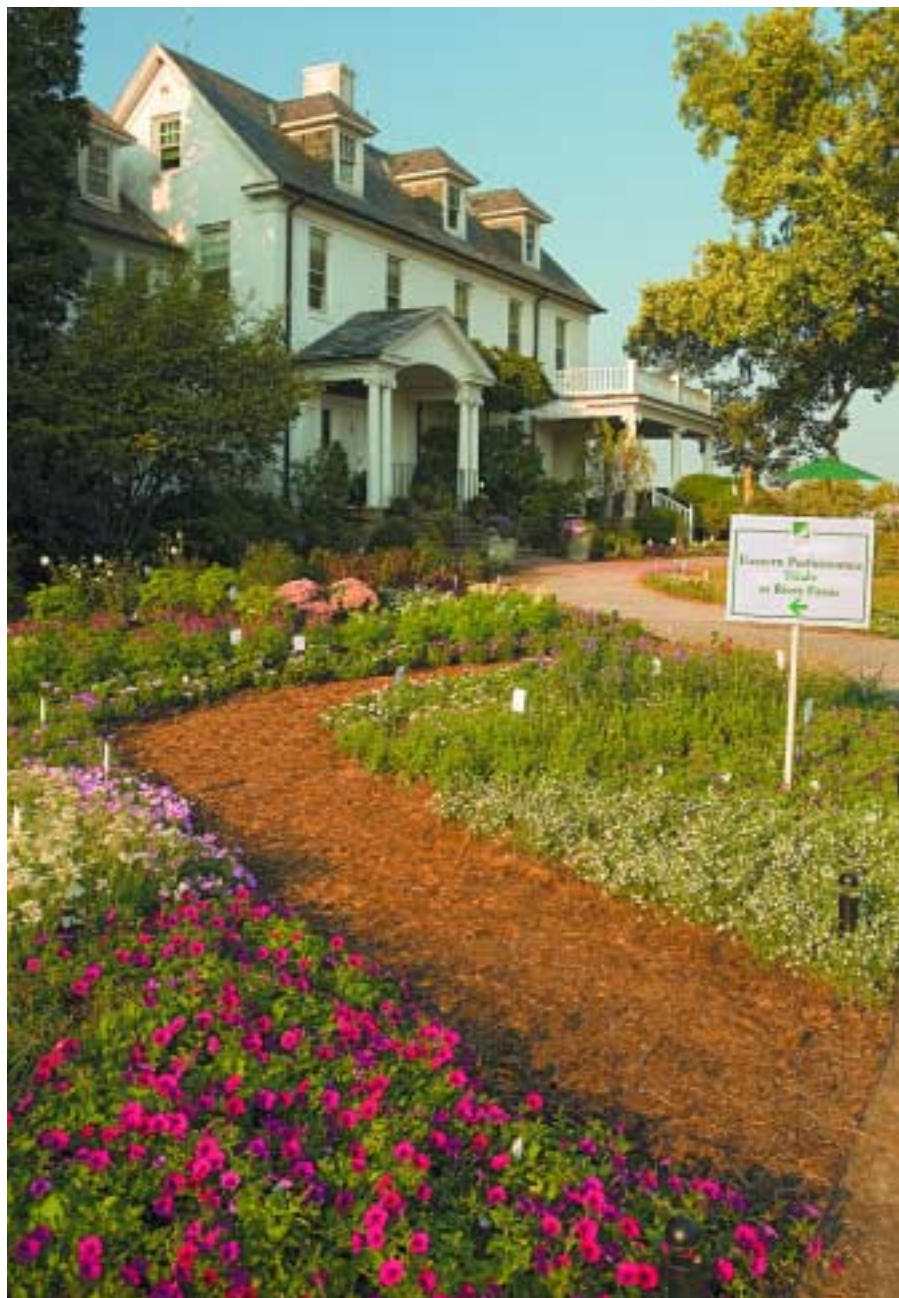
FOR SIX DAYS at six sites, 25 plant companies and over 100,000 plants attracted nearly 1,000 visitors to the first Eastern Performance Trials (EPT), held from September 19 to September 24.

Modelled after the California Pack Trials, a long-running industry event hosted each spring by dozens of West Coast plant and seed companies, the EPT lived up to its billing as a showcase for the plant industry's most exciting introductions for 2006.

"It was an incredible week for horticulture," says **Don Riddle**, chairman of the EPT advisory committee. "This event brought together so many different parts of the green industry, many of which haven't really worked closely together before—woody plant people,

Color abounded throughout the grounds at River Farm during the EPT. Above: A vivid assortment of plants from Centerton Nurseries. Right: New beds in front of the Estate House showcase plants that will be introduced un 2006 by Proven Winners.

2005 Eastern



perennial people, and annual people, retailers and wholesalers, landscape designers and growers."

Riddle's **Homestead Growers**, a division of **Homestead Gardens** in Davidsonville, Maryland, was—along with River Farm—one of the six host sites in the Mid-Atlantic for the debut of the

plant trials, which were coordinated by the **Garden Centers of America**, a non-profit group that supports independent retail garden centers. **Conard-Pyle Company** in West Grove, Pennsylvania; **Virginia Growers** in Montpelier, Virginia; **White's Nursery and Greenhouses** in Chesapeake, Virginia; and

Performance Trials



The EPT exhibits at River Farm began, above left, with a new pathway flanked by large trees from Cherry Lake and containers from Campania filled with plants from the EPT partners. The recently refurbished White House gates linked the pathway to the EPT displays. Above: An EPT attendee, right, chats with Proven Winners representative Sharon Gravitt about the company's summer collection. Left: Visitors enjoy the colorful display of annual bedding plants by Goldsmith Seeds.

to see the spirit of cooperation and creativity among companies that don't often work together," says Onofrey. "Everyone worked very hard to make it succeed and this first year was a great start to get the concept across."

RIVER FARM SPARKLES

River Farm, decked out in newly created garden walks and vibrant floral displays, exemplified how the EPT modeled the glamour of New York's Fashion Week,

McDonald Garden Center in Virginia Beach, Virginia, also hosted the event. In addition to the hundreds of registered green industry members who visited one or more trial sites, members of the public attended special open days at each site. Many AHS members took advantage of the open day at River Farm on Septem-

ber 22 to get a first-hand look at the transformation of the gardens.

"Each location took a totally different approach with their displays," says **Delilah Onofrey**, who visited all six sites while covering the EPT for Meister Media Worldwide, which publishes several horticultural trade publications. "It was nice



Above: Purple and white petunias and sweet potato vines create a timely display in Goldsmith Seeds' floral clock. Right: Centerton Nursery's "Performance Hi Way" is paved with a dark-leaved oxalis and other plants. Bottom right: A statue of Pan from Campania provides a fitting focal point for Saunders Brothers' boxwood allée.



from which it took inspiration. The gardens around River Farm's estate house were manicured to perfection, setting off the displays of the five participating plant companies. During EPT week, several staff members from each company were on site to answer questions and talk with visitors about the new plants and displays.

As visitors entered the exhibit area they first walked along a curving pathway flanked by large trees from **Cherry Lake Tree Farm** and mixed floral plantings in containers from **Campania International's Longwood Gardens Collection**. Passing through the AHS's White House



AHS President Katy Moss Warner and Green Industry Yellow Pages founder Steve Cissel tour the EPT displays at River Farm.

gates, the next exhibit area featured **Proven Winners** plants in newly designed beds in front of the Estate House. Visitors then experienced the spectacular view of the meadow and Potomac River as they walked around the side of the house to the **Goldsmith Seeds** display, distinguished by red umbrellas and a floral clock. Moving toward the AHS Children's Gardens, the display for **Saunders Brothers** featured an elegant allée of boxwoods. Nearby, **Centerton Nursery** showed off its plants with a "roadway" of oxalis flanked by colorful perennials, grasses, shrubs, ground covers, and roses.

A PROMISING START

"For the AHS, this was a wonderful op-

portunity to collaborate with the green industry and draw attention to our River Farm headquarters," says AHS President **Katy Moss Warner**. "I'm so proud of the effort all the participating companies and our staff put in to make this event such a big success. Thanks to all the important contributions from so many people—including our AHS Board members—River Farm has never looked better."

To see photographs from the other EPT sites, as well as images of some of the new plants that were displayed, visit www.easternperformancetrials.org. Many of the plants displayed at River Farm will also be featured in an article on 2006 plant introductions in the January/February issue of *The American Gardener*. 