New Poinsettia Cultivars

If you are in the market for some new poinsettia varieties, here are this year’s new introductions.

By Jim Barrett, University of Florida; John Dole, North Carolina State University; and Allen Hammer, Purdue University.

Did you notice that poinsettia sales dwindled a little for the 2003 Christmas season? Well, here are some of the newest poinsettia cultivars trailed in the 2003 National Poinsettia Trials. They are sure to add some new excitement for customers for the 2004 Christmas season.

In last month’s issue of Lawn & Garden Retailer, associate editor Catherine Evans asked a few retailers about their 2003 poinsettia seasons. Many reported that reds were the best sellers, as they are every year. “We had 20-plus varieties, but red is always the most popular,” said Alfred Hicks, president of Hicks Nurseries, Inc., Westbury, N.Y.

Mitch Mayes, owner/vice president of Louisiana Nursery, Baton Rouge, La., agreed. “Traditional red was the best. In the last week or so we barely had a red left.” But there are so many types of reds — reds that are big, small, light, dark, speckled, etc. How do you choose, especially when everyone carries red poinsettias? Look at the new varieties below to find reds, pinks, novelties and many other types to add to your mix.

Push your supplier for the 2004 poinsettia season. Because they’re new, make sure you communicate with your suppliers as soon as possible.

The descriptions below are based on how the cultivars performed in our trials, and we have only written about those cultivars that we personally grew.

Green Goods

By Jim Barrett, University of Florida; John Dole, North Carolina State University; and Allen Hammer, Purdue University.
RED CULTIVARS

1-99 (Ecke Ranch). Not pictured. (Previously ‘Thanksgiving Red’ and ‘Velveteen Red’. As of this writing, a final name has not been chosen.) This early-flowering variety has a general appearance and habit similar to ‘Red Velvet’. The smooth, medium-red primary bracts are large, while other bracts are small, creating an open center. Cyathia clusters are small.

‘Autumn Red’ (Ecke Ranch). The bracts of Autumn Red are upright, elongated and bright red with an orange cast; foliage is dark green. Plants are medium to low vigor. Distinctions of this cultivar are its bract presentation and plant strength.

‘Cortez Electric Fire’ (Fischer USA). This distinct cultivar has bright orange-red bracts, which really stand out against the reds. While most American consumers prefer darker reds, they liked this cultivar, and it scored quite high in preference surveys. Electric Fire has the growth habit of ‘Cortez Red’.

‘Christmas Poem’ (Selecta First Class). (Number SK 39 in trials.) The primary bracts of this medium-vigor variety are large and elongated and held horizontal; the color is a slight bluish red. Christmas Poem is a nice cultivar with strong, upright branches.

‘Christmas Spirit 2’ (Selecta First Class). (Number SK 35 in trials.) This cultivar has medium-sized, bright red bracts that are slightly heart shaped and held upright; foliage is dark green. Individual cyathia are larger than most cultivars and provide good contrasting yellow, green and red colors. It has good lateral shoot development and medium vigor. Christmas Spirit 2 scored high in consumer preference surveys.

‘Early Orion’ (Fischer USA). Very similar in growth habit and appearance to ‘Orion Red’, with large, medium-red bracts and dark green foliage. Early Orion shows color and could be shipped 5-7 days earlier than Orion Red.

However, in the trials, EarlyOrion produced slightly fewer cyathia than did Orion Red.

PINK CULTIVARS

‘Pink Elf’ (Fischer USA). This new pink is similar to ‘Red Elf’ in terms of growth habit, earliness, bract shape and display. Like most dark-leaf varieties, the pink color is not great. Older bracts are lighter; younger
bracts have a darker pink color. This cultivar is useful because of the need for pink in the earliest markets.

‘Premium Hot Pink’ (Dummen USA). This cultivar is the best of the Premium colors with dark rosy-pink bracts that are held horizontal to upright. The older bracts are uniformly colored, and the foliage is dark green. This cultivar matches the others in the series for height but flowered later. This cultivar is an excellent compact dark pink.

JINGLE BELLS CULTIVARS

‘Shimmer Pink’ (Ecke Ranch). This is an excellent new novelty cultivar that finishes before Thanksgiving. The upright bracts are a bright, medium pink with distinctive white flecks that are colorful and attractive; studies have found that consumers will pay a higher price for this plant. The foliage is dark green.

‘Winterfest Jingle’ (Oglevee Ltd.). This cultivar has medium-red bracts with pink flecks and dark green foliage that is strikingly shiny. Transition bracts are large and obvious with green edges.

MARBLE CULTIVARS

‘Premium Marble’ (Dummen USA). Bracts have a medium-pink center and creamy white edges, with very dark green foliage. In all trials, the bracts were rolled down at the edges and did not flatten out like others in the Premium series.

NOVELTY CULTIVARS

‘Limelight’ (Dummen USA). Contorted, creamy white bracts with a yellowish green color are the same shape as ‘Avant Garde’ or ‘Strawberries and Cream’. Not really dark green flowers, but few plants listed as such truly are. Many of the plants had one or more branches with normal appearing bracts. Lower-than-average vigor, with midseason finish. Truly funky and

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Top to bottom: ‘Shimmer Pink’ (Ecke); ‘Winterfest Jingle’ (Oglevee); ‘Premium Marble’ (Dummen); ‘Limelight’ (Dummen).
different. Great conversation plant that fits the lime green trend in home decor.

‘Premium Apricot’ (Dummen USA). The large, flat older bracts are a creamy white with pink veins, and younger bracts have an attractive light pink cast. No other currently available cultivars have this appearance.

‘Twister’ (Dummen USA). This is a midseason cultivar with curled leaves and bracts similar to Winter Rose. The bract color is light red with slightly lighter green and smaller foliage and smaller bracts than ‘Winter Rose Dark Red’. Twister has larger centers with more cyathia and produces more lateral branches than Winter Rose Dark Red.
‘Winterfest Coral’ (Oglevee Ltd.). This cultivar has unusual, large, dark-pink bracts with a slightly orange cast, and the foliage is dark green and shiny. As with others in this series, the transition bracts are large and obvious with green edges. It is well matched to the Winterfest series.

‘Winter Rose Early’ (Ecke). A good addition to the Winter Rose series. It has positive series characteristics: strong stems and color, dark green foliage and excellent shelf life. This cultivar’s important features are that it flowers at least one week earlier and is less vigorous than Winter Rose Dark Red.

PEPPERMINT CULTIVARS

‘Merry Christmas 2’ (Selecta First Class). This peppermint is a good addition to this color class. It has dark green foliage. This cultivar scored well in consumer preference surveys.

WHITE CULTIVARS

‘Improved Silverstar White’ (Fischer USA). Creamy white, horizontal bracts with a green tint. The light green foliage has an interesting grayish cast and narrow but bright-white edges.

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Top: ‘Merry Christmas 2’ (Selecta); Bottom: ‘Improved Silverstar White’ (Fischer).