

Poinsettias ON TRIAL

Compiled by Darhiana Mateo and Paige Worthy

The University of Florida's annual poinsettia trials drew a large crowd of everyday people — just like your customers — eager to see how the brightest new varieties would stand up to classic favorites in their eyes.

Consumer Picks

We had more than 450 consumers come through the poinsettia trials during our open house at the University of Florida. The public is invited to tour the trials and participate in evaluating varieties based on their individual preferences. Our student club also has a sale during this event, where the average purchase is more than \$50 per person. Attendees tell us that they come to the open house because they want to see and purchase the newest and most novel plants.

Participants in the consumer preference survey were asked to pick their 10 favorite varieties out of the 106 in the trial (Table 1, right). Given the interest of these consumers, it is not surprising that the top varieties included several novelties and newer varieties. 'Sonora White Glitter' and 'Shimmer Surprise' have been around for a while — they're perennial favorites and show the consumers' interest is high-end jingle-bell types. For more information on some others in the top 15, see the next page. — *Jim Barrett*



Rank	Variety	Percentage picking variety in top 10
1	'Sonora White Glitter'	44
2	'Premium Picasso'	38
3	'Cortez Burgundy'	37
4	'Carousel Dark Red'	33
5	'Shimmer Surprise'	33
6	'Classic Red' (1090)	30
7	'Merlot'	28
8	'Orange Spice'	26
9	'Winter Rose Early Red'	25
10	'Silverstar Marble'	24
11	'Carousel Pink'	21
12	'Christmas Spirit'	20.5
13	'Polly's Pink'	20
14	'Winter Rose Early Pink'	20
15	'Autumn Red'	19

Table 1. Participants were asked to pick their favorite 10 varieties out of the 106 varieties in the trial. 420 participants completed this question.

Probing Poinsettias

One of the biggest influences in how a new poinsettia is evaluated comes down to which part of the industry the evaluator is coming from, says Jack Williams of Ecke Ranch. "The eye of a grower looks for something quite distinct and different than the eye of a retail distributor; the needs and desired characteristics are skewed toward factors most important to the segment represented."

As retailers, there are several key things you should look for.

In spite of the key differences between what a grower looks at when evaluating a poinsettia versus a retailers perspective, "the optimum partnership" would be the combined focus of both a grower and a retailer, says Williams, "As it is today, not enough retailers are actively involved in looking at trials and helping make selections for which poinsettias will be available in their stores."

So, what are you waiting for? These poinsettias will end up in your inventory; it's only right that you have a say in which ones make the cut.

OVERALL APPEARANCE: Does a poinsettia have a strong visual presentation that's desirable and looks good under the difficult lighting conditions found in most retail outlets? As most evaluations are done in greenhouses, the natural light enhances bract color and does not show what they will look like under the specific light sources used.

POST-PRODUCTION DURABILITY: Does a poinsettia have characteristics that minimize shrink in the retail outlet? Issues of stem breakage, bract necrosis and cyathia drop, among others, are all critical to the success of the variety and are not factors demonstrated during greenhouse evaluations, where plants are fresh.

THE "WOW" FACTOR: Does a poinsettia have that something special about it to help stimulate sales? Here is where novelty is important! Does a new poinsettia stand out from the rest? For example, poinsettias with upright or horizontal leaf/bract presentation look "fresher" compared to varieties with naturally cascading leaves and bracts, which can appear tired or wilted even under prime conditions. — *JACK WILLIAMS*

GREEN GOODS

Pretty in Pink



'Polly's Pink' is a new, interesting pink that is much brighter than other pinks on the market. When shown only pink varieties, about half of the consumers at the trial picked this as the best. It was the top-ranked pink poinsettia at last year's University of Florida trials and has received high marks at other trials as well. However, some individuals do not like it because it is so bright — some even liken its hue to a fluorescent-pink highlighter.

Orange: A Novelty Concept

'Orange Spice' is a vibrant, fiery orange that creates a lot of interest. But it can turn people off, especially the traditionalists. They'll say, "That's interesting, but I don't want it for Christmas. It doesn't go with anything." It'll cause a stir because it's so different, but anyone trying to order it from a grower to sell it should understand that it's a distinctly orange color that doesn't fit in with most decorations very well. So position it as a different kind of plant...maybe for Halloween? It'll be tough selling a poinsettia as anything but a Christmas plant, but with some marketing brains and a few open-minded customers, you could be in business. However, under natural season production, it won't finish in time for a late-October holiday. It's a late-season plant — put it under a special production schedule to have it in flower by Halloween.



Ravishing Red

'Classic Red' is a variety worth mentioning. It's now a named Ecke variety, but anyone who's had it as a trial would know it as Experimental No. 1090. As a plant, 'Classic Red' tends to be larger and showier; it was developed to suit smaller growers trying to differentiate themselves from a mass-market plant. The "classic" part? The plant has an "older" appearance, more like poinsettias of the past. The bracts are long and narrow instead of large and wide like current poinsettias. From surveys of consumers at the University of Florida trials, consumers tended to like that appearance: It's the highest-rated standard red variety.



LearnMore!

For more information related to this article, go to www.lgrmag.com/lm.cfm/lg020809

Keep your holiday alive

with Molor's Automatic Christmas Tree Waterer



The **Tree Fountain** keeps needles healthier and greener longer by ensuring that the Christmas tree has a constant supply of fresh water. This revolutionary water system consists of 2 non-moving parts, and has the ability to shut off automatically. The **Tree Fountain** is a simple and convenient device to use, and ultimately subtracts from holiday stress.

Molor Products Co. • 190 Kendall Point Dr., Oswego, IL 60543-8803
Ph: (630) 375-5999 Fax: (630) 375-5595 • www.molor.com

Write in 814

CHRISTINA'S WORLD

Join us in celebrating the Spirit of the Holidays and the enduring beauty of glass ornaments. Collectible Santas, patriotic memories, exquisite butterflies & flowers, beaded novelties, wild animals, delicate eggs, crystal garlands, finials and a multitude of miniatures. See Christina's beautiful underwater creations including sea anemones, dolphins, mermaids and nautilus. Enjoy her garden full of sunflowers, roses and herbs. Find teapots, shoes and purses. Discover the largest selection of 2" glass ornaments, and be captivated by the whimsy of our collectibles including the clip-on piglet, bumblebee and reindeer — all at prices that guarantee you have a profitable holiday season. Always surprising, always elegant, always affordable — that's Christina's World.



27 Woodcreek Court Deer Park, NY 11729
Tel: 631-242-9664 • Fax: 631-586-1918
buytrim@aol.com • www.christinasworld.com
AmericasMart 20-D-6

Write in 778

Nothing is Easy...

UNLESS you have Bowling's **LAST** Stand!

WE HAVE DEVELOPED BOWLING'S **LAST** STAND OF ALL STEEL CONSTRUCTION WHICH YOU CAN DEPEND ON FOR QUALITY AND ENDURING STRENGTH. IT IS PAINTED REGAL RED AND WILL GIVE YOU A LIFETIME OF PLEASURE.

- The T-Bolt handles makes straitening and tightening the tree a cinch
- You can have your Christmas tree up in no time
- Available in 6 sizes: 6", 8", 10", 12" and 16"
- We also make a stand for artificial trees

Made in the USA
US Patented



Bowling Enterprises, Inc.

PO Box 457, 6705 Spruce Ridge Drive
Bear Lake, MI 49614-0039
888-556-4673 (toll free) 231-864-2675 (fax)
www.bowlingslaststand.com



"I'd like to thank you for introducing us to your terrific tree stand. We had a tremendous response to them from customers and sales were as good as you predicted."
Hyannis Country Garden, Inc., Hyannis, MA

"We appreciate doing business with you and your timely deliveries. We look forward to receiving your Christmas Tree Stand for years to come!"
Altum's Garden Center, Zionsville, IN

Write in 780