



GAU POIN PREFE

Find out which poinsettias consumers have identified as their favorites before you place your order for Christmas 2003.

By Bridget White

There is always considerable discussion over which poinsettia cultivars independent garden centers should carry and which cultivars consumers prefer. The new cultivars and their success at retail have changed the industry's mindset of what a poinsettia should look like. Remember when 'Winter Rose Dark Red' was introduced and few industry folks liked it, but within a couple of years, almost everyone was selling it?

THE TRIALS

We are providing the results of the consumer surveys conducted at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind.; University of Florida (UF), Gainesville, Fla.; and Homewood Nursery, Raleigh, N.C. These surveys are conducted in conjunction with the National Poinsettia Cultivar Trials and are supported by the major poinsettia breeder companies: Dummen USA, Paul Ecke Ranch, Fischer USA, Oglevee Ltd. and Selecta First Class. At Homewood, 40 individual plants are placed at the entrance of the retail greenhouse during Thanksgiving weekend. Customers voted for their favorites through the Christmas shopping season. At University of Florida, two days after the industry Open House, consumers were invited to view the trials, and some additional survey plants were set up. For the Purdue study, plants were moved to the conservatory greenhouse at White River Gardens in Indianapolis, Ind., from November 28 until December 29.

OVERALL FAVORITES

The figures below show the results from Florida, Purdue and Homewood where consumers picked their favorites from a large group of different cultivars. Across the three surveys, there are six cultivars in the top 15 on at least two of the lists. Those are 'Sonora White Glitter', 'Jingle Bells 4.0', 'Monet Twilight', 'Cortez Burgundy', 'Carousel Red' and 'White Christmas'; none of which are traditional red plants. This does not mean everyone should exclusively stock these cultivars. These results, along with results from previous years, do show that independent garden center consumers are attracted to the new and different.

There can be no doubt that Sonora White Glitter, Carousel Red and Cortez Burgundy are probably the most popular cultivars from the surveys, as they have been at the top of consumer surveys for several years. All three are very distinctive, either in color or bract shape, and will draw premium prices.

The other cultivars mentioned — White Christmas, Jingle Bells 4.0 and Monet Twilight — are also non-traditional in the sense that none of them are standard reds. White Christmas often has the best white bract color in consumer trials and will be a great

Rank	Cultivar	Percent picking this cultivar
1	Cortez Burgundy	35.6
2	Sonora White Glitter	26.6
3	Jingle Bells 4.0	22.5
4	Red Angel	22.3
5	Plum Pudding	21.7
6	Christmas Dream	21.5
7	Olympus	19.5
8	Silverstar Peach	18.0
9	Carousel Red	17.4
10	Prestige	17.2
11	Happy Christmas	17.0
12	Nutcracker Red	15.2
13	Enduring Pink	14.4
14	Monet Twilight	13.9
15	Carousel Pink	13.5

Rank	Cultivar	Percent selecting this cultivar in top 3
1	Sonora White Glitter	15.0
2	Pizarro	13.2
3	Monet Twilight	9.5
4	Strawberries 'N Cream	8.4
5	Sonora Jingle	8.4
6	Winter Rose Dark Red	8.3
7	Jester Red	7.3
8	Red Elf	7.1
9	Velveteen Red	6.9
10	Jingle Bells 4.0	6.0
11	White Christmas	5.8
12	Lemonsnow	5.1
13	Christmas Cookie	4.8
14	Carousel	4.7
15	Cranberry Punch	4.6

Pictured clockwise from top left: 'Monet Twilight'; 'White Christmas'; consumer trials at Homewood Nursery; Results by color from the University of Florida; Participants at the University of Florida were asked to pick their top 10 cultivars out of the 100 shown. Four plants of each cultivar were shown with names. There were 226 completed surveys; Consumers in the Purdue study were shown 112 cultivars identified by name and were asked to pick their favorite three. There were 1,154 participants; Consumers at Homewood Nursery were asked to pick their favorite five from the 40 individual cultivars, identified by numbers only. There were 534 participants.

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complement to jingle bell types such as Jingle Bells 4.0. Jingle Bells 4.0 is a newer cultivar that many consumers have not seen. Though it does not have real strong branch strength, it has been well received by consumers.

Red might be the traditional Christmas color, but many consumers prefer a softer color scheme and will appreciate cultivars such as Monet Twilight. This cultivar has been around for a while and continues to be among consumer favorites.

FAVORITE REDS

In the Purdue and Florida studies, more focused tests were conducted where participants were shown only a few cultivars. Consumers were shown a small group of red cultivars and asked to pick their favorite three plants. 'Freedom Red', the dominate cultivar in the market, was in the bottom half of both studies. In the Purdue

Rank	Cultivar	Percent
1	Sonora White Glitter	52.00
2	Monet Twilight	49.40
3	Cortez Burgundy	40.20
4	Holly Point	39.70
5	Chianti Red	27.50
6	Carousel	27.10
7	Jingle Bells 4.0	25.30
8	Marblestar	25.30
9	Maren	24.90
10	Plum Pudding	21.40
11	Eternity Red	20.50
12	Sonora Dark Red	19.60
13	Christmas Wish	19.60
14	Pepride Red	18.30
15	White Christmas	17.50

Rank within class	Cultivar	Percent picking in their top 10
1	Chianti Red	27.50
2	Eternity Red	20.50
3	Sonora Dark Red	19.60
4	Christmas Wish	19.60
5	Pepride Red	18.30
1	Sonora White Glitter	52.00
2	Jingle Bells 4.0	25.30
3	Jester Jingle	11.40
4	Sonora Jingle	5.60
1	White Christmas	17.50
2	Snowcap	16.60
3	Santa Claus White evol.	7.90
4	Whitestar	6.90
5	Sonora White	3.50
1	Maren	24.90
2	Enduring Pink	9.20
3	Santa Claus Pink	6.90
4	Freedom Pink	6.10
5	Winterfest Pink	3.90
1	Christmas Candy	10.90
2	Da Vinci	8.30
3	Champagne	2.20
4	Amazone Peppermint	1.30
1	Marblestar	25.30
2	Santa Claus Marble	13.10
3	Puebla	7.00
4	Sonora Marble	4.40
1	Monet Twilight	49.40
2	Cortez Burgundy	40.20
3	Holly Point	39.70
4	Carousel	27.10
5	Plum Pudding	21.40

study, 'Orion Red' and 'Christmas Cookie' were the top two cultivars, which illustrates the diversity in the preferences of consumers. Orion is one of the industry's top cultivars and has the common blueish-red tint, while Christmas Cookie has the brightest orange-red color of any commercial cultivar.

Among the top cultivars in the Florida study were 'Merlot' and 'Chianti Red'. They do look different, as Chianti has distinctive cyathia with multiple nectaries and deeply lobed leaves and bracts. Unlike Winter Rose Dark Red, these two cultivars are probably not distinctive enough to warrant a premium price. The UF students sold standard, single-plant, pinched, 6½-inch red poinsettias for \$7.50 and other colors and specialty varieties for \$10-\$20. They could not get \$10 for Chianti. 'Olympus', the second-place finisher, is a new, interesting cultivar with the bract color of Orion but slightly smaller leaves and bracts. The bracts are held up in a horizontal plane.

OTHER FAVORITES

In another study, consumers were asked to pick their top three from a group of cultivars that represented various types of poinsettias. The two top choices were very distinctive. Ecke 54-99 is a new cultivar that will be available

in 2004. It has bright red bracts with white markings. While we might be tempted to call this a jingle bell type, it is so distinctive it should be classified as a novelty separate from jingle bells. Another version of this is Ecke 6401, which has a bright pink background. Both will be very popular with high-end consumers. The runner up, 'Holly Point', has very low vigor. In the past two years, UF grew Holly Point as a typical single-pinch plant in a 6-inch pot, and this small plant did not attract much attention. This year, students put four cuttings in an 8-inch bulb pan, and those were the plants shown to the consumers. Notice that Holly Point was the number-four choice in the Florida study. The UF students sold plants that were about 12 inches tall for \$20-\$25.

USING THE DATA

If many of the cultivars mentioned above seem unfamiliar, you should not be surprised. There are hundreds of available cultivars, and growers can only produce a limited number of these. There has also been a substantial lag between the introduction of new cultivars and their adoption at the grower level. In other words, growers tend to produce the cultivars that are most familiar until certain that the new introductions are either in demand or provide documented production benefits.

And this is where the above research can be of use to you. Becoming familiar with the most customer-preferred cultivars will enable you to work more closely with your growers — to have some input on which cultivars will be available to you.

One thing to remember about adding additional cultivars to your mix: While it is important to differentiate your store with a variety of plant material, including the newest releases, you should not aim to carry so many different cultivars that you neglect core sales, namely standard red cultivars.

For most garden centers, 6-inch red poinsettias still comprise approximately 70-80 percent of sales, but for consumers, this product has become a commodity, selling at chain stores last season for \$2 each. The newest and the most unusual cultivars can not only bring variety to your poinsettia offerings, they can bring higher prices. As indicated above, the most unusual novelties often sold for two times the standard. While there may be a premium from the grower, because often these cultivars are difficult to produce, the return in exposure and price point is well worth it.

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This article is based on research conducted by Dr. Jim Barrett, a professor of floriculture and Dr. Rick Schoellhorn, an extension specialist at the University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla.; Dr. Allen Hammer, a professor of floriculture at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind.; and Joe Stoffregen, manager of Homewood Nursery, Raleigh, N.C. These researchers would like to thank the poinsettia breeders, their universities and technicians, and all the

