

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Proven Winners Partners with Classic Caladiums

Chris Beytes

Proven Winners is once again expanding its assortment by adding caladiums from breeder and producer Classic Caladiums, which was co-founded by breeder and tissue culture expert Bob Hartmann in 2000 with the late Harry Hollander, founder of ABBOTT-IPCO (today, Harry's son Richard runs the company).

In the partnership, which starts officially in July for the 2019-2020 season, Proven Winners will get the exclusive on 20 of Classic's "best, most unique varieties" (as the press release describes them), with more varieties added each year. They'll be sold with a branded Proven Winners pot. Finished plants will come through Proven Winners' annual propagator network: Four Star Greenhouse and Pleasant View Gardens in the U.S. and Nordic Nurseries and Sobkowich Greenhouses in Canada. Bulbs will ship direct from Classic.

"For Proven Winners, it just made really good sense," Dave Konsoer of Proven Winners replied via email. "As we look to expand our brand, we are focused on finding innovators that are the best in their field—Classic Caladiums checks those boxes, along with so much more. Classic is the leading worldwide supplier of caladiums—they have exclusive breeding and extensive production experience. And we wanted to add more sun/shade varieties with a tropical look and feel to the Proven Winners brand for containers, combinations and in the landscape.

"As for Classic, they saw this as an opportunity to join forces with the #1 plant brand and turn on our marketing machine to bring a tremendous amount of trade and consumer attention to their amazing and under-utilized caladiums. So, it was a great fit and I'm beyond excited to build awareness for these versatile and stunning plants."

As for Classic Caladiums, National Sales Manager Nelson Darden explained just how exclusive the relationship is.

"Classic has been developing unique genetics for years, which gives us a strong and stable supply of great new varieties," he said. "We will still provide our current list of genetics to our existing customers, but not under the Proven Winners brand. Classic is the world's largest commercial caladium producer. Our continued research and development will provide opportunities for all customers to benefit."

Is Classic Caladiums worried that an exclusive deal with Proven Winners might tick off their other customers—especially other brokers?

"Actually, just the opposite," he replied. "Classic's brokers will sell the Proven Winners Caladium varieties just as they sell our other items. So there is no change there. The broker network is exceedingly strong. Proven Winners consistently educates and provides new products for this channel. In the long run, the entire category will benefit as the consumer learns new uses for this unique crop."

The caladium supply, the vast majority of which comes from Central Florida, is notably susceptible to weather challenges. How will Classic consistently meet Proven Winners' demand season to season?

"Classic has consistently evolved, learning from weather events," answered Nelson. "We have invested considerable capital in improved production practices to ensure we have strong, vibrant, sustainable stock plants that improve bulb quality, consistency and size."

The partnership debuted to the industry at the California Spring Trials in March. **GT**