

# GROWERTALKS

Web Exclusive

## Acres Online

*Chris Beytes*

### Colorado Trials

Sometimes I wish summer field trials were run like the California Pack Trials—an organized two-week adventure where all you did was hop from trial to trial in your rental car. But field trials are spread out coast to coast, and the airfare to visit a decent sampling of them is costly, to say the least. So we have to be selective. This year, that meant Colorado, where I visited Colorado State University (CSU) and Welby Gardens.

**Colorado State** . Colorado State University's trial is excellent—nicely grown in a former Ft. Collins city park. Dr. Jim Klett talked about the development of the gardens over the past four years. It's becoming a major stop for anyone serious about summer trials. It covers 2.8 acres, has nearly 1,000 varieties from 27 companies planted in 14 major beds, 400 containers, a shadehouse and an All-America Selections (AAS) trial. The shadehouse is cool: welded steel construction, including perforated metal shading. Jim likes it too; his last shadehouse was destroyed in a storm. This one stood up to several feet of snow.

Most interesting was the fact that the trial was 70% vegetative, 30% seed. That's because CSU grows whatever the participating companies send in (for a fee). That means you get to see a wide range of new genetics, as opposed to the standards you've seen for years. And the vegetative stuff is grown in beds as well as containers, which is helpful for finding new marketing ideas. For instance, the blue flowers of scaevola Outback Fan Dancer (Ecke/Flower Fields) looked great as a groundcover, especially planted next to osteospermum Crescendo Orange (also from Ecke). And if you're into geraniums, zinnias, marigolds or petunias (seed and vegetative), this trial is for you; they obviously thrive in the bright, dry climate.

A few new varieties that looked good include Magellan zinnias (Goldsmith), argyranthemum Madeira Santana (Ball FloraPlant), snapdragons Crocodile Candy and Crocodile Purple Eye (Ecke), marigold Moonstruck (S&G), trailing petunia Jamboree Lavender II (GoldFisch), verbena Aztec Red (Ball FloraPlant) and vinca Titan (PanAmerican), which showed its hybrid vigor despite being in a newly dug bed that was lacking nitrogen.



**Welby Gardens** . What we like about Welby's trial is it's a grower's trial—Welby puts in the stuff they want to see and sell. They're also doing some serious drought research, attempting to show that there are some bedding plants that require less water than turf (as evidence for the next time a city such as Aurora, Colorado, decides to ban flower planting during a drought). The work is being done by a CSU grad student. Ironically, Welby had a ton of rain in July, which makes it tough to conduct a drought test. But there are three other drought trial sites, so one of them is likely to be dry.

Welby gives visitors flags to stick in their favorite varieties. Multiple-flag earners included a rose-colored double-flowered zinnia in the AAS trial garden, marigold Moonstruck Orange (S&G), petunia Easy Wave Blue (PanAmerican), rudbeckia Prairie Sun (Benary), petunia Symphony Pink (Sakata), verbena Aztec Red (Ball FloraPlant), verbena Lanai Blue (GoldFisch), calibrachoa Callie Orange (GoldFisch) and calibrachoa Minifamous Dark Blue (Selecta).



## Painted poinsettias: Gilding the lily?

Last edition, I took a poll: Vote yes or no for painted poinsettias (as seen at OFA). Here's what some of you said:

*I believe that traditional consumers play a strong role and will always be there; however, I was excited about the painted poinsettias when I first saw them at OFA. They made me curious, intrigued ... I just had to find out more about them. Consumers love 'New & Exciting' options. I believe this will bring great value to a product that growers are struggling to make a profit on. We have not finished poinsettias for many years now at Four Star, so I consider myself very unbiased and feel a smart grower should embrace such an opportunity. Consumers will love these and will be more than willing to pay more for them! I vote YES .—George Strimpel, Four Star Greenhouses*

*I assume that the next rollout will be gilded lilies ... -- George Elliot, University of Connecticut*

*Painted poinsettias: no, no, NO!!! Talk about gilding the lily ... This is my strong opinion as a consumer: If I were still in business and my customers demanded them, I'd be a fool not to provide 'em, but I'd sure hope they'd just be a fad.—Candy Jens*

*Painted poinsettias - YUCK! If people want something in purple shaped like a poinsettia, they may as well make it out of plastic. Just the opinion of a very small poinsettia grower at a college hort program.—Susan Mintun*

*On the subject of painted poinsettias, I too, as an "old-timer" find them way too funky for my taste ... however, if they sell, I'm all for them. Just one guy's opinion.—Joe Boarini, Grande Greenhouse*

*If I'm allowed to comment ... I don't like painted flowers. But that's because I don't like fake or phony things. Poinsettias are terrific as is. If you're going to paint them, why not just buy plastic ones that you don't have to paint? They're just as real, in my opinion. Don't insult the poinsettias with paint! The paint is probably toxic and bad for the environment as well.—Pam Barz, Ball Publishing (and a typical consumer)*

Notice how, with one exception, the guys seem more willing to sell painted poinsettias if consumers want them? The women, in two out of three examples, said "no" to them—even though it's their peers, the poinsettia-buying females of the world, who would be choosing between traditional red and untraditional orange or blue. Interesting.

## Finally, an updated Poinsettia Manual

Just in time for your 2004 poinsettia crop, Ecke, with the help of Ball Publishing, has released the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of its venerable Ecke Poinsettia Manual. The manual has updated history, production techniques, pest management, variety information and marketing advice. Some of you may remember the original manual, written by Paul Ecke Jr. and O.A. Matkin in 1971. Subsequent editions followed in 1976 and 1990. This most recent edition was updated by Paul Ecke III, Andy Higgins, as well as Jack Williams of the Ecke Ranch and Dr. James Faust of Clemson University. "The previous manuals did an outstanding job of covering this balance of art and science, and we kept much of that foundation intact in this edition," says Andy. "We overlaid it with new techniques and science, new philosophies in production and marketing and, of course, with all new cultivars." You can order the book, which retails for \$49.95, at <http://www.ballbookshelf.com>.

# Don't forget our Wage & Benefit survey

If you haven't done so yet, please take just a few minutes to take our online Wage & Benefit survey. We think it's the most comprehensive and accurate in the industry, but that's only because you and your fellow growers are willing to share information about your payroll—anonynously, of course. If you're a grower or retailer, please go to <http://www.growertalks.com/wbsurvey> and fill one out.

Thanks for reading. See you next time,

Chris Beytes

Editor

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