

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Consumers and Containers at Cornell

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Consumer Buzz Live

During Cornell University's annual Floriculture Field Day, held July 21, they hosted one of Green Profit's famous Consumer Buzz Live consumer focus panel for an audience of about 75 growers and retailers. We've done several dozen of these around the country, and it never fails to enlighten the audience to hear from real, live consumers.

Key messages from these focus groups continue to reveal that consumers want "information" and "inspiration."

They want to know what to buy—what will work for their situation. How and where to plant it, and how to care for it. And they want that information to be easy to find and understand. The web may be filled with cultural info, but they want to get it from your employees and/or from your signage.

"Inspiration" means they want ideas—what can they do to dress up their home? How can they use the plants they've bought? Change your gardens and displays with the season so there's always a new idea to find in your garden center.

While "friendly, knowledgeable employees" is a given "must-have" among consumers, this particular group offered a new insight. The panel was discussing how important it is that employees are trained to respect and care for their good customers, when one woman added that it's also important that the garden center takes good care of its own employees. "You can tell from their attitudes," she said, whether employees are well cared for or are just treated like nameless workers. In other words, a happy workplace makes for happy employees, and that makes for happy customers. —*Chris Beytes*

Industry picks

In the afternoon, Field Day attendees gathered in the annual and perennial beds of Cornell's Bluegrass Lane Horticultural Research Facility for walking tours and the presentation of the annual Kathy Pufahl Memorial Container Design Competition awards (plus ice cream from the world-famous Cornell Dairy Bar).

In the annual beds, they did one of those fun "stick-a-flag-in-your-favorite-flower" votes. The top vote getters

proved that Pack Trial hype can't beat old-fashioned, 55-m.p.h. landscape color.

With 15 votes each, it was a three-way tie between Sanvitalia Cuzco Yellow (Syngenta), Zinnia Zahara Fire (PanAmerican Seed) and Ornamental Millet Jade Princess (PanAmerican Seed), a new sister variety to Purple Majesty Millet. It doesn't have the showy flowers of the other two; visitors liked it for the bright green foliage topped with fluffy burgundy spikes. Nice contrast, and quite compact, too—it grows to 36 to 48 in. versus the 48 to 60 in. of Purple Majesty.

Earning 12 votes each, were Salvia Velocity Blue and Lobelia Techno Heat Upright Light Blue (both Syngenta). Next, with 11 votes, was Petunia Shock Wave Denim (PanAmerican); 9 votes, Cleome Seniorita Rosita (Proven Winners); 8 votes, Geranium Calliope Deep Red (Syngenta); and 7 votes, Lobularia (alyssum) Snow Princess (Proven Winners).—*Chris Beytes*

Kathy Pufahl Memorial Container Design Contest

Once again, Green Profit was asked to judge the Kathy Pufahl Memorial Container Design Contest, now in its sixth year. The event is held to honor the founder of Beds & Borders in Laurel, New York, who was a pioneer in the use of specialty annuals and tender perennials as container elements.

Proceeds from the registration of containers and any container sales go to research on pediatric Crohn's disease.

The winners of the 2009 competition are:

12-in. Hanging Basket Category. First place: Helderledge Farm, Altamont; second place: Mischlers Florist, Williamsville; third place (tie): Finger Lakes Community College & Mark Adams Greenhouse.

16-in. Container Category. First place: Zema's Nursery, Stephentown; second place: Mischlers Florist, Williamsville; third place: Helderledge Farm, Altamont.

Open Category. First place: Helderledge Farm, Altamont; second place: Lockwoods Greenhouse, Hamburg; third place: Zema's Nursery, Stephentown. —*Ellen C. Wells*