Superbells Cherry Star: Innovating Calibrachoa Color

Dr. Rick Schoellhorn

The introduction of the Star types into the Superbells collection is new for 2011-2012. This breakthrough in color involves a clearly delineated yellow star along each crease in the pink petals of each flower, creating a look more similar to Convolvulus than to Calibrachoa. Breakthroughs in color patterns in flowers create new interest and excitement in this crop altogether.

When it comes to new breeding in any crop, there is often a bit of adjustment in grower practices required. However, with Cherry Star this is not the case. Unlike last year’s introduction of Blackberry Punch, which requires more sunlight and is a bit more sensitive to overwatering in the early season, Cherry Star is as easy to grow as any of the Superbells. The habit is slightly more upright rather than trailing, which makes it easier for small container production. The flowers are held on the outside of the canopy and the star pattern was tested for heat tolerance, so the gold star is stable all season long.

Production
Production requirements for Superbells Cherry Star are the same as for all calibrachoa. Provide bright light throughout the production cycle; apply 200 to 250 ppm balanced liquid feed, and maintain a pH between 5.8 to 6.2 to produce the highest-quality crops. Using a chelated iron formulation of fertilizer is always a good idea on heavy feeding crops such as calibrachoa and petunias. Chelated iron is much easier for plants to absorb both through the roots and leaves.

Lighting
While none of the Superbells are day neutral, Cherry Star is considered to be in the midseason flowering category among the Superbells, flowering under northern U.S. natural day conditions in Week 9 to 12. While this should be fine for northern growers, it may impact some southern producers if they are looking for flowering in Weeks 1 to 6. Flowering is earlier under high light western and southern conditions; however, flowering will only move forward about a week or so on untreated liners. For growers in the South and Southwest, be sure to ask your supplier for enhanced liners, which are produced under long days as a way to
bring crops into bloom earlier.

Superbells Cherry Star represents another new direction in breeding to develop not just bicolor blooms, but tri-color and four-color flowers with complexity, high contrast, and heat stable coloration while continuing to build on a heat- and humidity-tolerant, disease-resistant chassis. Proven Winners hopes to be able to expand these novelty flower types into a collection of Superbells with colors even more jewel-toned than what is on the market now. Superbells Cherry Star is the vanguard of this new breeding effort, so keep your eyes open for even more amazing color combinations in the future.

Day Neutrality in Calibrachoa and Petunia

In speaking with breeders of this crop, they say they can breed for either early flowering or later flowering, but it is very difficult to widen the window of performance so that a cultivar flowers both early and performs as long into the season as a later-flowering cultivar. Choosing whether one wants early flowering or long-season performance, it’s nearly impossible to get both. Earlier-flowering varieties will bloom in Weeks 1 to 6, but as a consequence their summer performance will be cut short. Proven Winners looks for flowering in Weeks 6 to 8 as early crops. We do this so the consumer gets the benefit of an extended season of performance in later weeks in their garden. GT

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