

GROWERTALKS

Features

1/1/2015

Striking Blooms

Katie Elzer-Peters



BloomStruck, a *Hydrangea macrophylla*, is the newest addition to the Endless Summer collection. It was introduced to the retail market in January 2014 after a quick six years of testing and cultivation and growers are already doubling production for this stunning plant.

This is the first in a new series of articles in *Green Profit* for 2015, where we're pulling back the curtain and looking at the stories behind some of the hottest plant introductions hitting the market today. Unearthing the story behind BloomStruck is the perfect place to start.

In 2009, Dr. Michael Dirr and partners Mark Griffith and Jeff Beasley, owners of Plant Introductions, Inc., noticed a striking open-pollinated seedling of Twist-n-Shout in a field of 260 plants.

"There was this one plant with big rosy pink flowers and flower buds on every stem. It had deep red petioles, red veins and red stems. You didn't have to be a genius to figure out that this could be something good," Michael says. Not only was the plant aesthetically pleasing, it also appeared to be disease-resistant. "The plant was very clean. There was no mildew or cercospora leaf spot anywhere." They took cuttings, grew the plants and performed cutback tests; the plants passed every stage with flying colors.

If you're in retail, you know that the appeal of the original Endless Summer (introduced in 2004) was that it was a re-blooming *macrophylla*—a plant that bloomed on new growth as well as old growth, so low temperatures and winterkill were no longer a problem for hydrangea lovers. BloomStruck has survived and thrived in some epically cold weather. Natalia Hamill, brand and business development manager for Bailey Nurseries, has pictures of BloomStruck covered in flowers (old and new growth) after temperatures of -28F and 50 days below zero. Michael says, "It's been tested from Florida to Minnesota, east coast to west coast, and performs well everywhere."

In addition to its robust growth habit, BloomStruck is a showstopper in the looks department, truly living up to its name. Natalia says retailers love it because it stands out on the bench, even when not in bloom. The red stems, petioles and leaf veins are absolutely striking. That means it looks good all day long at the point of purchase. In comparison to the original, BloomStruck has a more upright growth habit, even more flowers per stem, and blooms with deeper, more saturated colors. "One of the really cool things about it is that, as the flowers age, they go through

this multitude of colors,” Natalia notes. “You can have violet, blue and rich ruby-colored flowers all on the same plant.”

Michael adds: “I have looked at a lot of hydrangeas. Maybe 100,000. I probably sound biased, but BloomStruck is the best one I’ve seen. It does what it is supposed to do. The best testimonial is that the grower likes it, and the gardener or customer has success. With this plant, all of the links in the chain hook together perfectly. I think it could supersede the Original Endless Summer in numbers.” **GP**

Katie Elzer-Peters is a garden writer and owner of The Garden of Words, LLC, a marketing and PR firm handling mostly green-industry clients. Contact her at Katie@thegardenofwords.com or at www.thegardenofwords.com.