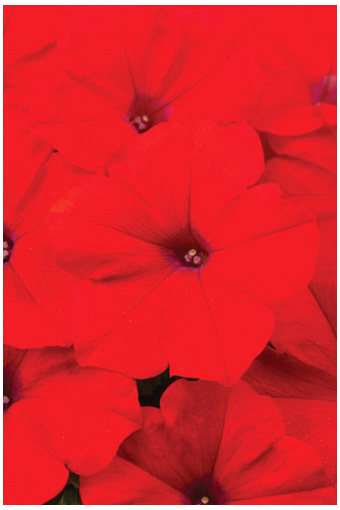
GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Orange Petunias No Longer Banned

Chris Beytes



Thanks to a decision by the USDA, flower breeders and distributors can once again sell petunias containing the once-banned maize gene; whether or not you'll be able to buy specific cultivars, or how soon, is up to the individual breeding companies.

A quick jog of your memory: Back in 2017, the USDA (as well as Canadian and European agencies) got word that there were petunias on the market that were considered genetically engineered because they contained the gene called "A1DFR" from corn plants, but weren't registered properly with the authorities, so they had to be pulled from the market. Most of the varieties were actually orange, like the Hells Fury pictured, although a few, such as Supertunia Raspberry Blast and Trilogy Deep Purple, weren't even though they contained the orange-inducing corn gene. (Read the whole interesting backstory at sciencemag.org/news/2017/05/how-transgenic-petunia-carnage-2017-began.)

Thanks to diligent work by German breeding company Westhoff (which owned quite a few orange petunias, including Hells Fury), the USDA has approved these plants for sale in the U.S. The lifting of the ban begins immediately. (Canada had already OK'd their sale.)

"This is the culmination of two and a half years of work on behalf of our breeders and the U.S. government," said Christian Westhoff, President of Westhoff. "This marks a milestone, not only for Westhoff and our partners, but our entire industry, as we move forward into a new era of plant breeding and variety development."

In the press release announcing the news, Westhoff said it wants it to be clear that although two of the breeders from Westhoff, Dr. Manfred Mehring-Lemper and Dr. Diro Terefe Ayana, were the driving force behind the multi-year effort to return orange petunias to the U.S. market, all varieties that contain the A1DFR gene can be legally sold, regardless of the company that developed the variety.

"This approach is consistent with Westhoff's long-held corporate mandate to ensure that novel breeding is brought to the marketplace, without restrictions, to allow for a competitive, innovative and robust floriculture industry," they stated.

As mentioned, we'll have to wait and see which of the 30 or so A1DFR gene-containing varieties might return to the market. As for Westhoff's Hells Fury, Hells Bells and their other vivid petunias, look for them in Spring 2022, they say. **GT**