

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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A Fall First

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Ball Seed's inaugural "Ball for Fall" garden event, held over two days—September 19 and October 3—brought in some 200 grower customers to look at how the newest mums, pansies and other fall-themed varieties were holding up during an unseasonably warm autumn.

It's been ages since there's been any formal trials event in the Midwest centered around mums, and that was one reason why they thought it would be a good idea to host one. But Jaime Kedrowski, Marketing Manager for Ball Seed, said that's not the only reason. One of the goals was to test the Ball Mums families alongside other breeders' genetics under Midwest conditions, as

is done with other flower trials, assessing bloom time, color and habit. Another reason was to showcase what Ball Seed has to offer their customers beyond the spring season.

"We've had some fantastic genetic innovation over the last couple of years across all of our breeding partners, and we're seeing the performance through the end of the summer, being more resistant to the heat and performing through the cooler fall season," Jaime explained. "Fall is also an opportunity for our growers to extend their season, so we wanted to highlight some of the mum varieties, but also other fall annual color that they can work into their programs."

"Our number one goal at the end of the day is to make sure that you have the easiest mum possible to grow—a good, reliable plant that you're not going to have to worry about over the summertime," said Jessie McMillin, Ball Seed's mums product manager.

Matt Foertmeyer of Foertmeyer & Sons Greenhouse drove all the way from Ohio to attend. Matt grow 480,000 mums every fall, so he and his dad, Mark, wanted to take advantage of the chance to see a side-by-side comparison of different cultivars in person.

"I asked about the transplant dates, and it helps that they were all planted on the same day. And that they didn't use PGRs, so it's a true trial," said Matt. "I hope they do this every year and that it keeps getting bigger."

Mike Clesen, owner of L&M Greenhouse in nearby St. Charles, Illinois, agreed.

"I'm glad this is a natural [daylength] trial, and it's a good comparison to how I grow them," said Mike. "I always try to include new ones, so I look for specific things, like a good, tight habit, decent flower size and good color."

When you ask growers what's the most popular color among consumers in poinsettias, you get the same answer—red. When you ask the same question about mums, you get a bunch of different answers. Attendees did agree that it's different every year, but it depends on your market and on the whims of the consumer. Mike said red and yellow went first this year; last year, the first to sell out was orange.

Matt said their number one seller is the daisy types and that he hopes that there's going to be breeding that will offer more options. "They've become the biggest part of this segment for us, but there aren't enough to fill the need."

If the Ball for Fall event wasn't on your radar, they plan on holding another one next year around the same time, though it may only be one day instead of two. Jaime also said that they're going to discuss expanding the trial to include more mum families and more colors. **GT**