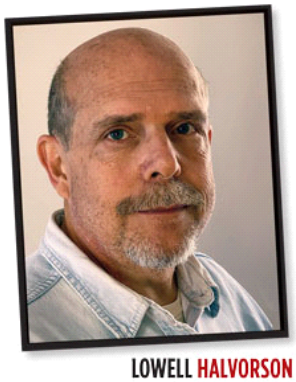
GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

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The Magic of Ageratum

Lowell Halvorson



Monarch Magic is in an interesting place right now. Introduced to the industry at the California Spring Trials in 2025, the cultivar has worked for a year in the wild. Actual sales numbers paint an interesting picture about market adoption. Larger second orders mean growers have moved from testing the product to trusting the product. A pattern emerges that explains who likes the plant and why.

Monarch Magic in baskets

Ask around. The big boom-back mentions basketwork time and again. Several reasons pop to the top.

Monarch Magic trails. Most ageratums don't do this, but those are seed varieties. This is a vegetative ageratum that sends out stems longer than usual, looking over the edge of a container. It doesn't lean over like spreading angelonias or tumble over like tuberous begonias. Monarch Magic hits the basket sweet spot: far out enough to be fluffy and full, but not spilling over to interfere with loading carts.

Blue is an obvious reason. Lobelias are blue, yes, but they're easy to fry. Monarch Magic works on the warmer side of spring into early summer. Bonus: It hides its dead beneath new floral growth, a good basket trait.

Durability is key. Ageratums are known as tough little guys that can sweat out rough bed conditions. In my opinion, life in a basket is tougher than any bed because there's so little soil to buffer temperature and moisture swings. Monarch Magic rolls with the punches.



A generally open habit allows other basket denizens to weave their way among the foliage. Protocols and timing may need to be adjusted when adding Monarch Magic, but basket growers naturally expect to do that.

Vigor picks up the pace. Most ageratums get lost among the foliage, but Monarch Magic keeps up with other quick-growing basket stalwarts. To keep it from taking over, pair it with compact varieties like any of the following:

- Angelonia: Guardian Angel series
- Calibrachoa: Cabaret series, Bumblebee series
- Lantana: Lucky series, Shamrock series
- Petunia: Bee's Knees
- Petchoa: EnViva series

Monarch Magic in beds

In landscape beds, the difference is less stark. Monarch Magic is a spreader akin to pansies, verbenas and petunias. If you've worked with these crops, you can poach those figures to calculate the cost per foot of Monarch Magic for a standard bed.

General puffiness adds height and airiness for fluffy versus flat beds. Seed cultivars tend to go low and create sheets of color; Monarch Magic poofs and mounds to blanket a bed with color. A word of warning: If you dry the plant down too much, it'll go out of flower. In the end, it's an ageratum, not a drought solution.

Specimens grown in large nursery pots look like those in the trial photo from Penn State. This size generally grows 12-in. tall by 18- to 20-in. wide. When planted in a full landscape bed, it offers a lightly mounded surface. Monarch Magic isn't a begonia gumdrop or a chrysanthemum centered dome, but somewhere between a bed of Beacon Impatiens and Lucky Lantanas that create a wavy surface. Ambient temperature/display sequence goes nemesia >

ageratum > lantana.

That pollinator magic

Monarch Magic attracts beneficials, as do other ageratum on the market. This reason powered the decision at Ball FloraPlant to push the cultivar into A-tier status with an equivalent launch: major marketing campaign, lots of noise and generous POP support. Ball FloraPlant's faith is supported by the various breeding and testing trials conducted. All participants commented on the clouds of butterflies Monarch Magic attracted.

- UGA Plant of Distinction: "Show-stopping blue flowers and ability to track butterflies." Large number of butterflies was highlighted; vigorous spreading habit was noted.
- Penn State: Significantly large plants grown in black containers stayed in flower July through August, 2025.

Better yet, ask the growers who reordered for the 2026 retail season. They'll answer, "Pollinators …" and a bunch of other reasons, but the conversation always swings back to butterflies. Oh, the butterflies! Ball FloraPlant even stuck one in the name. Note: A cluster of Monarch Magic hauls in more butterflies than a single specimen.



A specimen of Monarch Magic grown at the 2025 Penn State Field Trials.

Retail behavior

Right now, it seems the garden centers have sussed it out, as sales uptick is strongly biased toward the IGC channel. Independents build more kinds of baskets, so they're always on the lookout for new components. IGCs also have more flexibility/less risk compared to chains that have to make large block purchases.

Monarch Magic can help you build an experience based around pollinators that the chains haven't noticed yet. If you're interested, Ball FloraPlant offers preprinted POP items, including butterfly stickers, posters, cards, tags and pot decals to promote the pollinator benefit. Plant purchases can be very impulsive and effective nearby signage helps answer any questions consumers may have regarding new cultivars. These materials are available for purchase from Ball FloraPlant in small lots appropriate for IGCs. Check Ball Seed's WebTrack for details. **GT**

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