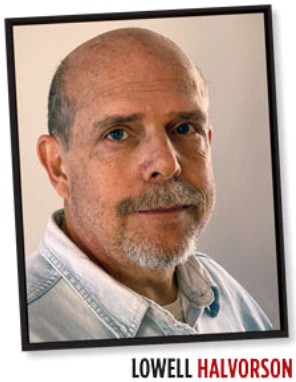
GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

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The Buzz on Elegance

Lowell Halvorson



Last fall, the internet lit up when videos and posts of the innovative new pansy, Elegance, began to appear on social media.

“Absolutely exquisite,” said Brian Bauman of Bauman’s Farm and Garden (Gervais, Oregon) on Instagram and Facebook. He shared his thoughts about the crop he grew, along with close-ups of the blossoms, on Instagram and Facebook.

Heidi Grasman of Garden Crossings (Zeeland, Michigan) notes its high bloom count as she builds a combo planter on YouTube and marvels over the unique look. If you watch her hands you can gauge the blossom size, stem lengths, bud counts and mounding habit as she mixes the pansies with Heuchera Silver Gumdrop.

There’s more: Corner Copia Gardens (Fairhope, Alabama), deMonye’s Greenhouse (Columbus, Ohio), Martinson’s Garden Works (Ridgeland, Mississippi), Perino’s Home & Garden Center (Metairie, Louisiana), Sky Nursery (Shoreline, Washington), Sugar Creek Gardens (Kirkwood, Missouri) and The Burrow Flower & Garden (Lovettsville, Virginia) posted images and videos or products for sale on the internet. Then there’s the chatter of the garden influencers. The comments are worth the scroll—that’s where the excitement is.

What’s so special?

Elegance sure energizes the customer base. Technically, these are ruffled, semi-double to double pansies. They’re not flat-faced, but rounded in three dimensions. The effect is closer in spirit to the textured ball of a mophead hydrangea or a round-y zinnia. Heavy ruffling and extra petals give them a shape of their own. I would argue that Elegance opens a distinctly new category of premium pansies.

Color is spirographic. No solids exist, nor do two-tone blends. Instead, shades and hues splash around the roller-coaster surface in blotches and whiskers and blushes. Elegance does ship in two collections: the Antoinette collection has pastel highlights, whereas the Twilight collection has darker, more saturated colors. Both have the same double fluffiness.



Like all pansies, Elegance responds to the temperature of its growing facility. Grow it cooler to get richer colors. Flowers and time are about the same as Matrix, but a bit earlier in some places. In a retail prime 4-in. pot, the foliage rises about 4-in. high, spreading about 4- to 6-in. wide and pushing out two or three flowers. As plants grow in the garden, they continue to mound. They don't spread or trail; they like to sit upright.

Elegance is available in one of two collections. The Antoinette collection focuses on the pastel-colored hues.

The breeder, Isao Sato of Japan, maintains an Instagram page, but you need to read Japanese. Still, the photos alone show the breath and skill of his craft. Garden centers and garden influencers are talking a lot about this series.

Some interesting reports about heat tolerance come from Texas, Louisiana and Alabama. Some growers and garden centers are reporting—along the Gulf Coast—better heat performance. Garden color lasts longer and the plants aren't so leggy and stringy under pressure. That's the talk. Colors and patterns feel crafted and artisanal for a reason. Isao Sato, the breeder from Japan, spent over two decades developing Elegance as a passion project before he decided to bring it to market. This is why the pansy seems to have hit the industry out of the blue.

It also explains the choice of Tagawa Greenhouse as its U.S. distributor. Back in the '80s, young Sato was an intern at the Colorado company. In a way, Elegance pansies honor his time at their farm.

Who would buy them?

Dominant grower/retailers: This is the obvious market. Every metro has a few of them. These businesses have strong local personality and the ability to grow out their own crops. They often put a high value on the decor side of their work, with a loyal fanbase who turn to them for interesting garden choices. Elegance works best in places that know how to showcase its charm and unique character. So far in my survey I've seen Elegance sold only in the larger pot sizes.

Early spring openers: Local enthusiasts visit the garden center as soon as the soil is workable, well before the last frost. Early IGCs seek out special material to open the season and attract those buyers. Typically, hellebores play that early spring role, but an affordable customer magnet, like a spectacular pansy, would be better.



Select commercial accounts: Landscaping firms who know how to sell color would find value in Elegance. There's almost always a flagship account that benefits from something special. Venues that gather lingering crowds or have walk-by gardens in high traffic areas come to mind. Hospitality clients like hotels and restaurants would appreciate Elegance, likewise entertainment venues, including zoos, parks and amusements. Decorative urns flanking medical buildings could use a dose of Elegance, too.

Left: The Twilight collection has the darker, more saturated colors. Notice the edging on some, but not all of the flowers. This variability keeps Elegance as a mix-only series.

How do you get them?
Tagawa is the North American distributor of Elegance Pansies. They ship these pansies only in wholesale liners of 128 cells with an order minimum as little as one tray. Depending on your location and order size, they deliver by FedEx, truck or via a network of refrigerated trucks and depots.

If you want to bring in finished pots, you'll have to fish around for a supplier and ask about availability. Tagawa has a list of finishing nurseries who'll produce material for wholesale customers, but it's an evolving and dynamic list. You could try Southwood (Oklahoma), Walla Walla (Washington), Clesen Wholesale (Illinois), Visser (Montana), Timbuk II (Ohio), Dupont (Louisiana), Telly's (Michigan) and Snell's (Maryland) if your shop is inside their shipping footprint. Technically, you could order a few trays for a quick trial to see what the bother is all about. If you sell pansies to a decor-conscious crowd, I highly recommend it. **GT**

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