

GROWERTALKS

Features

1/31/2014

Euphorbia Euphoria

Jennifer Zurko

N.G. Heimos Greenhouses | Millstadt, Illinois

Trials Manager: Amy Morris

What do you think of the new experimentals and what looks promising?

This year in our trial we had more than 140 varieties, of which 32 of them were experimental varieties, which overall were pretty nice. Of course, not all of them are going to succeed and be a chosen variety, but there are some really nice looking new varieties.

A few of my favorites this year were the 20-11 White from Ecke, Christmas Ribbons from Selecta, RF VK 1301 from Dümmer and Beekenkamp Pon 6 Medium. All have really good potential in our markets.



Which varieties were attendants' favorites?

That's kind of a hard question to answer because everybody has their favorites. Not everyone likes traditional red. They also have their favorite novelties, pinks and whites. The few that really stood out to me were Premium Ice Crystals (Dümmer), Majestic Pink (Ecke), Whitestar (Syngenta), Harlequin (Beekenkamp) and Christmas Beauty Nostalgia (Selecta).

Pictured: An experimental from Dümmer was a stand-out at the Heimos trial.

What do you think the industry is looking for in a poinsettia? What do growers want?

I think the industry is looking for a poinsettia that will hold up the best in their retail areas with longer shelf life for the consumer. I also think the industry is looking for a niche, something different. Something that's going to pop that makes that consumer say, "I have to have it in my house." If it's good color or good structure that draws the consumer to that plant, that's what they're looking for.

As a grower, I'm looking for a quick, cool finishing, energy-efficient plant that's going to hold up for our retailers. My goal is to make people happy. When a person purchases a beautiful poinsettia, brings it in their home and can look at it every day and be happy, that's really what the plant industry's about. It's about giving people that warmth and a happy feel. That's why people are drawn to plants. At the end of the day, consumer success is what we want and hope for.

Any production issues? If so what were they?

For Heimos, the only issue we had was a really bad heat wave during the initiation of the natural crop. This resulted in the natural crop coming in anywhere from a 7- to 15-day delay in finishing depending on the variety.

Which was the best red? White? Pink? Novelty?

I can tell you for the Midwest what I feel is our best reds, white, pink and novelty, but it really depends on your region, your weather and what you're growing it for. I would never use the same variety for a 4 in. as I do my 10 in. to 15 in. I make sure I grabbed the best genetics that are going to finish in the proper size pot.

Our favorite reds would be Prestige (Ecke), Viking (Dümmen) and Solar (Beekenkamp). Our pink would be Maren (Ecke) and as I said earlier, Majestic Pink and Christmas Ribbons looks very promising. Both of these new pinks are ones I want to put in next year's production. For white, I would say Whitestar and Marble (Ecke) or Marbella (Selecta). For the novelties, I think Premium Ice Crystal (Dümmen), Harlequin and Orange Spice (Orange Spice).

Dümmen NA | Encinitas, California (Ecke and Dümmen varieties)

Trials Manager: Dr. Catherine Ku

What do you think about the new and experimentals? What looks promising?

New—

- Northstar Red (1360)—Mid-season, dark leaf, vigorous, upright branch habit
- Advantage Red (1303)—Mid-season, dark leaf, vigorous, upright branch habit
- Majestic Pink (19-12)—Mid-season, dark leaf, vigorous, upright branch habit
- Overture Dark Red—Early, vigorous, dark leaf
- Prima Donna (NN 1301)—Mid-season red, dark leaf, moderate vigor

Experimental—

- 1362—Early season novelty, vigorous, pink peppermint variety, upright habit
- 1409—Early season novelty, compact, dark leaf, light yellow/bronze, upright branch habit
- RF VK 1301—Mid-season red, vigorous, dark leaf, upright branch habit

Which varieties were attendees' favorites?

Northstar Red, Prestige Red, Jubilee Red, Ice Punch, Visions of Grandeur, Premium Red, Premium Ice Crystal (non-painted and painted), Glacé

What do you think the industry is looking for in a poinsettia? What do growers want?

- Plants that branch well, but don't break down in shipping
- Plants that hold up well during the shipping process and have good shelf life
- Growers want varieties that are strong and tolerant of non-optimal growing conditions

Which was the best red? White? Pink? Novelty?

- Best Red—Ecke Jubilee Red, Red Fox Premium Red
- Best White—Ecke Polar Bear, Red Fox Glacé
- Best Pink—Ecke Majestic Pink, Red Fox Premium Lipstick Pink
- Best Novelty—Ecke Ice Punch, Red Fox Premium Ice Crystal

North Carolina State University | Raleigh, North Carolina

Trials Manager: Dr. John Dole

What do you think about the new and experimentals? What looks promising?

We had a very large number of new and experimental cultivars in the trials this year. Several of the experimental cultivars from Beekenkamp looked excellent, including one with unusual rounded bracts. Dümmer's Glacé Early looked promising for a new bright white and their Prima Donna did well for us. For Ecke, the new Majestic Red was excellent with large bracts and excellent branching. Selecta's Christmas Ribbons was a gorgeous dark peppermint-type with strong branches.

Which varieties were attendees' favorites?

We hold a separate consumer open house, where we ask the public to select their favorites.

- Red—Christmas Eve (Selecta) and Neva (Syngenta) (close second)
- White—Infinity Polar (Dümmer)
- Pink—Mars Pink (Syngenta)
- Novelty—Sonora White Glitter (Syngenta) and Ice Punch (Ecke) (close second)
- Combination pot—Ice Punch and Sparkling Punch (Ecke)

What do you think the industry is looking for in a poinsettia? What do growers want?

Most poinsettia cultivars are quite good these days, so it's getting more difficult for new cultivars to be better than what is already out there. It's also harder for the new cultivars to get noticed among the ever-growing number of cultivars. Thus, breeding is increasingly focusing on the finer points of a poinsettia cultivar that will allow a grower to grow the crop more cost effectively:

- Can it be used for multiple formats (small to 6.5 in. to large pots)? This reduces the number of cultivars to be managed and makes cutting inventory management easier.
- Does it respond well and consistently to PGRs?
- Does it branch well? Does it have strong branches? Does it have a V-shape pattern to allow easy

sleeving?

- Is it easy to grow? The days of coddling a cultivar are over. A cultivar probably won't be picked up by growers if it needs special attention to become a high-quality plant.
- Does it have good post-harvest characteristics? For example, does it hold on the bench well? Does it keep its cyathia? Is it resistant to bract edge burn? Is it less susceptible to botrytis? Does it keep its lower foliage?
- For the non-reds, is it a bright white? A clean pink? A stable Jingle Bells?

Any production issues? If so what were they?

This was a good year for us for whiteflies (few) and root rots (very little). It was a bad year for us for botrytis.

Which was the best red? White? Pink? Novelty?

Sorry, but it's too hard to pick just one for each color.

Kansas State University | Manhattan, Kansas

Trials Manager: Kimberly Williams

What do you think about the new and experimentals? What looks promising?

One promising new red from Dümme was a superstar in our trials—RF VK 1301. This variety has darker, slightly maroon bracts; great architecture and dark green leaves. It was the favorite red, by far, by survey respondents in our consumer preferences evaluation. This variety will be trialed by Dümme again next year.

Ecke's 19-12 sample was the favorite pink variety in our trial. The bract color was a bright and vivid pink that our survey respondents found more appealing than the darker, duller pinks.

Dümme has a fantastic new white, Glacé Early. This variety is an improvement over Glacé, which is known for its pure white bracts. Glacé Early retains the very white bracts of Glacé, but also has shorter response time, great architecture and dark green leaves.

Which varieties were attendees' favorites?

Ecke's Jubilee Jingle Bells was voted "Best in Show" by survey respondents. This speckled variety with dominantly red bracts and white or light pink spots really caught the attention of our guests. It has great architecture and dark green foliage in addition to the striking bract coloration.

What do you think the industry is looking for in a poinsettia? What do growers want?

Strong stems that won't break during shipping, high quality and vigorous cultivars even under cooler production temperatures, and shortest possible production cycles.

Any production issues? If so, what were they?

The growing conditions of this poinsettia season were the best of the past few years in the Great Plains. Regional producers were commenting on how well their crops were growing at the Kansas Greenhouse Growers' Association meeting in October, and we also experienced a fantastic crop from excellent production conditions in Manhattan, Kansas.

Which was the best red? White? Pink? Novelty?

It's important to preface this response with the note that we had only 46 varieties in our trials this year, all from Dümme and Ecke. However, our 100-plus survey respondents chose some exceptional standouts from this group. The best red by far was RF VK 1301, followed by Infinity Red and Jubilee Red. The favorite white was Glacé Early, followed by Infinity Polar and Premium Polar. The favorite pink was 19-12 Sample from Ecke, followed by Premium Lipstick Pink and Jubilee Pink. The favorite novelty by far was Jubilee Jingle Bells. Premium Picasso and Premium Ice Crystal rounded out the top three novelty cultivar preferences.

Vineland Research & Innovation Centre | Vineland Station, Ontario, Canada

Trials Manager: Wayne Brown

What do you think about the new and experimentals? What looks promising?

There were no “knock-your-socks-off” new experimentals, but certainly there continues to be refinements/improvements by the various breeders and certainly some breeders are “testing the waters” by introducing varieties with more vigor or with smaller bracts. In our trials here in Ontario, as one would expect, some new varieties performed very well, while others not so well, but may be more appropriate in a southern climate. Some new experimentals are either too compact or too vigorous. Bracts of some new and experimentals developed too much crinkling, so the inflorescence is untidy.

- Reds—Christmas Wish (SK 101, Selecta); RF VK1301, RF HJ1301 and RF NN 1302 (Prima Vera, Dümme); Advantage Red (Ecke 1303) and Ecke 1230 (has very orange red bracts)
- White—The challenge is to find a clear white with dark leaf foliage. Christmas Beauty North Pole (Selecta) is a lime white usually referred to as “Polar” in other families, but is an excellent addition to the Christmas Beauty family. Glacé from Dümme is the whitest of them all, but its acceptance will be challenging because of its light green foliage, above-average vigor and its relative late maturity.
- Pink—Christmas Beauty Pink (Selecta) and Saturnus Pink (Beekenkamp) are both excellent relatively new pinks.
- Novelty—Ecke 19-20 named Majestic Pink has below-average vigor, but produces layers of flat, long narrow bracts in a clear, rich salmon color. For Ontario, we would recommend the pot be ringed to support the broad spreading branches.

Which varieties were attendees' favorites?

At Vineland, we have two open houses, one for growers and one for consumers (general public). Growers are

much more circumspect about their views or opinions when it comes to new varieties. For growers, they clearly need to observe a significant advantage to change from their current main-season red.

For growers—

- Red—Christmas Day and Christmas Beauty Red (Selecta)
- White—Wintersun White (Selecta), White Star (Syngenta)
- Pink—Christmas Beauty Pink (Selecta), Saturnus Pink (Beekenkamp)
- Novelty—No clear trend. Premium Ice Crystal and Premium Picasso as well as Ice Punch (all from Ecke) were noted more than other novelties.

For consumers—

- Red—Christmas Day (Selecta), Charon Red (Beekenkamp), Prestige (Ecke)
- White—Glacé (Dümmen), White Star (Syngenta), Christmas Beauty North Pole (Selecta)
- Pink—Mars Pink (Syngenta), Christmas Beauty Pink (Selecta), Saturnus Pink (Beekenkamp)
- Novelty—Ice Punch (Ecke), Sonora White Glitter (Syngenta), Premium Ice Crystal (Dümmen)

What do you think the industry is looking for in a poinsettia?

Who do you mean by “the industry”? The large chains? Independent garden centers? Do we know whether the consumer actually prefers large bract varieties or smaller, more compact bract poinsettias? Smaller means fewer shipping issues and damage for growers, but is that what consumers want?

What do growers want?

This simple question has no simple answer! There are so many factors at play for the grower including: the retail chain with which a grower is working, the price point, the retail chain plant specifications and expectations. What do Ontario growers want in a poinsettia?

- A plant that has an upright habit and all of the stems, including the basal stems, have strong upright angles that aren't prone to breakage during handling (during sleeving and shipping).
- The growth habit should result in a rounded plant form rather than a totally flat top so that there's color all around.
- For 15-cm (6-in.) production, a plant height of 33 to 38 cm (12 to 14 in.) rather than 38 to 41 cm (14 to 16 in.) because the plant is much more attractive and can be used by the consumer in many more ways.
- Also, varieties with large caliper stems; that break easily and uniformly at time of pinching with no weak or blind nodes; mid-season maturity, but hold well in the greenhouse for late season shipping; have large, strong and colorful cyathia.
- The goal is increasingly all about growing and shipping 100% of the plants on the bench.

Any production issues? If so, what were they?

No real production issues this year in Ontario. Silver-leafed whiteflies were not an issue; many growers

utilized biocontrol strategies quite successfully.

Which was the best red? White? Pink? Novelty?

From my perspective from a plant habit, bract shape, color and inflorescence form the following would be my picks:

- Red—Christmas Beauty Red and Christmas Joy Red (both from Selecta), RF VK 1301 (Dümmen)
- White—Glacé (Dümmen), Christmas Beauty North Pole (Selecta)
- Pink—Christmas Beauty Pink (Selecta)
- Novelty—Premium Ice Crystal and Marco Polo (both from Dümmen), Sonora White Glitter (Syngenta)

University of New Hampshire | Durham, New Hampshire

Trials Manager: David Goudreault

What do you think about the new and experimentals? What looks promising?

Most of the new cultivars we received for trialing were red, with Dümmen topping the list at eight new red, numbered experimentals. 2013 was a season where nearly every new and older cultivar looked very good with strong branching and bract displays. However, Dümmen's RF NN 1301 and RF NN 1302 were definite standouts. Selecta's SK 91 along with Christmas Joy and Christmas Glory were strongly branched with bright red bract displays.

I believe the most promising developments are in the white cultivars, particularly with Dümmen's Glacé and the new Glacé Early. Glacé arrived on the scene in the 2012 season and was an immediate favorite with its crisp, pure white bracts. However, from a northeast grower's perspective, the 9-week response time and very light green foliage kept it a marginal choice. The new Glacé Early with its snow-white bracts, dark green foliage and 7.5-week response time made it a standout in 2013. The tight bract display will likely also make Glacé Early easier to ship.

Syngenta's Whitestar has held a well-deserved place for many years as the best white for Northeast growers. Glacé Early appears poised to become the new standard white cultivar. Ecke's Polar Bear is another excellent white, but many visitors don't appreciate the green highlights.

Selecta took an interesting direction with the introduction of Christmas Beauty Nostalgia, a light pink cultivar with green highlights. As the name implies, the plant definitely has the look and feel of an old-fashioned Christmas. However, trials visitors typically felt the green highlights gave it an unfinished look—interesting, but not a plant they would be inclined to purchase.

Which varieties were attendees' favorites?

- Red—RR 1301, NN 1301 and HJ 1301 (all from Dümmen)
- White—GL 1301 (Dümmen), Glacé (Dümmen), Polar Bear (Ecke)

- Pink—Christmas Beauty (Selecta), Polly's Pink (Ecke), Mars Pink (Syngenta)
- Novelty—Ice Punch, Red Glitter and Sparkling Punch (all from Ecke)
- Overall—Ice Punch and Red Glitter (both from Ecke), Christmas Beauty Pink (Selecta)

What do you think the industry is looking for in a poinsettia? What do growers want?

The strong V-shaped branching and durability of Ecke's Prestige still makes it the standard red for many growers. These characteristics are being incorporated into all of the new cultivars being released. But finding a series of colors with similar vigor and timing can be a challenge, particularly for growers producing specialty pots of red, white and pink. Syngenta's Mars series works well; Ecke's new Jubilee series may be a good option. Dümmer's Premium series is extraordinarily uniform and durable, but New England growers find that it doesn't size up adequately for large specialty containers. Vigorous root systems that may be more resistant to pythium root rot would be another desirable characteristic.

Any production issues? If so, what were they?

The 2013 growing season in New Hampshire was about as ideal as it gets with lots of sunny days into early November. Biological control agents were successfully used to control whitefly and fungus gnat. Pythium root rot seems to be the one production issue that continues to plague us—in spite of our best attempts at cultural and biological control, we still need two to three fungicide drenches through the production period.

University of Florida | Gainesville, Florida

Trials Manager: Dr. James Barrett

What do you think about the new and experimentals? What looks promising?

We had more than 50 experimental varieties and most won't be introduced, which is typical. The standard varieties have gotten so good it's difficult for the breeders to make improvements. Most promising were:

- Advantage Red (Ecke)—A good option for growers looking for a Prestige-type plant, but better in larger formats and for differentiated markets.
- Christmas Wish (Selecta)—Has the growth habit of Christmas Day and Christmas Beauty, but more vigor for larger plant sizes. The star bract characteristic gives a good mix of green and red.
- Majestic Pink (Ecke)—Very unique plant appearance and color that will be useful for IGC/florist markets.
- Christmas Beauty North Pole (Selecta)—Good white to go with Beauty.

Which varieties were attendees' favorites?

Christmas Beauty (Selecta), Premium Red (Dümmer), Advantage, Ice Punch, Red Glitter (all three from Ecke)

What do you think the industry is looking for in a poinsettia? What do growers want?

In the Deep South—

- Red for an early market that has stronger stems and doesn't heat delay.
- A red for December 1 that has Prestige strength, but doesn't heat delay.
- An early white with good color and better disease resistance.

Any production issues? If so, what were they?

Timing this year was early, so growers had to hold plants longer than desired, which created botrytis and other problems. Warm temperatures late in the crop caused some issues with height control and weak plants.

Which was the best ...?

- Red—Christmas Beauty (Selecta)
- White—Christmas Beauty North Pole (Selecta)
- Pink—Majestic Pink (Ecke)
- Novelty—Ice Punch (Ecke) **GT**