

# GROWERTALKS

## GT in Brief

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### Poinsettias at Millstadt

*Jennifer Zurko & Chris Beytes*



The week before Thanksgiving, a few Ball Publishing folks took the five-hour ride from Chicago to St. Louis to Millstadt Greenhouses to see the Midwest's only poinsettia trial and what some are calling the biggest and best poinsettia trial in the country. In fact, with the news that 2015 is the last year for poinsettia trials at Dan Schantz in Pennsylvania, Millstadt will be one of the only remaining grower trials in America. (Another is Mitchell's in North Carolina, which has 9,000 plants in 105 varieties; Millstadt grows more than a million plants for

sale and over 10,000 just for their trial, so they're a tad bigger.) Even poinsettia expert and tough critic Karl Trellinger of Syngenta (formerly of Fischer) says it's a fair trial and a good one. "If we didn't have this trial, we would have nothing," he said.

*Pictured: Adam Heimos and Amy Morris keep the mood light when talking about the thousands of poinsettias they grow for their customers and Millstadt's annual open house.*

As for trial stats: about 2 acres of greenhouse, five breeders (Beekenkamp, Dümmer Orange, Ecke, Selecta and Syngenta) and 165 varieties (by our count in the trial book). Of those, 71 were experimental or pre-introduction varieties! Obviously, those breeders are hard at work on poinsettias. They grow in many sizes, too—from 2 in. to 15 in. and poinsettia trees in 10-in. pots for IGCs. Nine thousand of the plants were grown in 6 in.; 2,000 in 8 in.

Every year, Millstadt asks its visitors (which totaled about 350 over two days) to rate their favorites by color. The results were:

- **Best Red:** Tie between Christmas Joy Red (Selecta) and Pallas Red (Beekenkamp)
- **Best White:** Whitestar (Syngenta)
- **Best Pink:** SK-109 (Selecta)
- **Best Novelty:** Premium Ice Crystals (Dümmer Orange)

- **Best New Number:** RF184FL (Dümmen Orange)
- **Best New White:** Exp. Big White (Syngenta)
- **Best New Novelty:** D21 VGI (Florensis)

For the past two years, the Millstadt Poinsettia Trial has been run by Adam Heimos, nephew of Amy (Heimos) Morris and Bernie Heimos, and he seems to enjoy it.

“You know how you’re not supposed to put your heart into something, but you do? It’s like that with poinsettias,” Adam admitted.

The trial is grouped together by family, then color, timing and vigor. They’re also grouped by whether the plants were grown under black cloth, under lights or natural.

The Heimos family started the Poinsettia Open House six years ago “for selfish reasons,” said Amy. They wanted to show off what their father Norwin had built with his business, so they invited people to come and see it.

“We can’t afford to go to our customers and other growers, so we invited them here,” she explained. “After some of the other trials ended, more people encouraged me to continue.”

And this is not an event that you can throw together in a few weeks. Adam and Amy said that planning for the Poinsettia Open House starts in March and it takes a lot of organizational skills to keep all of the material, labels and inputs straight. But, for Millstadt, it’s been worth it.

“People think of us as the poinsettia experts,” said Amy. “And the breeders are very grateful because they trust us. If we’re going to be the staple, we’ve got to be as perfect as possible.” **GT**