

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Trials, Florida-Style

Chris Beytes



Sixty or so landscapers and nursery professionals, mainly from Florida, tour the flower trials at the Orange County University of Florida IFAS Extension Education Center in Orlando on May 18, one of three locations of the annual Florida Flower Trials. It was a chance to see genetics from many of the major breeders (along with local products from caladium producers Bates Sons & Daughters and Classic Caladiums) under the challenging Florida climate. The other two trial locations are Walt Disney World and Leu Gardens.

The Florida Flower trials have an interesting history, says Linda Reindl of the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association (FNGLA), dating back to when they were held at the University of Florida in Gainesville, with programs at

Alan Shapiro's San Felasco Nursery.



When the university lost its funding for the trials, FNGLA took over the educational aspect of the trials, but attendees wanted to see plants! That led to a partnership with Epcot, which offered up a patch of land. The trials were held there for two years, but were determined to be more of a variety showcase than a trial, since the plants were pulled out of the ground shortly after the event instead of being left to try to survive the summer.

Pictured: Linda Reindl (left) and Kelly Greer.

Enter Leu Garden and the Extension Education Center, which offered up space for true trials. The Extension office caters mainly to professionals, especially landscapers. Leu Gardens puts new varieties in front of consumers. And Disney found a new behind-the-scenes location where they could leave plants in the ground all summer (Disney is the largest consumer of annuals in the state, so it's an opportunity for breeders to perhaps impress Disney's horticulturists and get their genetics into the park). This is the eighth year of the partnership between the three locations.

"I think this [the Florida Flower Trials] is something that's perfect for Central Florida," says Kelly Greer, the horticulturist responsible for the Extension Center's trials. "We have rain, heat, cool breezes ... everything you experienced today." **GT**