

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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New Kids on the Block

Roger McGaughey

GardenChoice



Dahlightful Dahlia



SylvesterBlue Nepeta



MiniBeckia Flame
Rudbeckia



GreatMyrtle
Lagerstroemia

For those of you who haven't heard, there's a new company in the world of horticulture dedicated to providing unique, well-trialed perennials to our industry. In the current pandemic environment, it's more important than ever to provide quality products to our customers. We at Pioneer are excited to be a member of this new alliance.

GardenChoice is the name of this new group and it's comprised of four well-recognized companies in the perennial world:

- Eason Horticultural Resources (EHR), an independent full-service broker
- Botanical Trading Company (BTC), an independent "box store grower specialist" representing flower bulbs and herbaceous perennials from some of the world's best plant breeders
- Pioneer Gardens (PG), an independent grower of bareroot and liner-produced herbaceous perennials
- GardenGenetics (G2), an independent plant breeding company

responsible for many of the top-performing annuals, perennials and shrubs in U.S. garden centers

This group is a voice for the independent breeder network to bring their qualified material into the horticultural market with a full-service game plan from trials, testing and propagation to marketing and introduction. Together, they're currently producing a number of new items for the perennial grower:

- Dahlightful Dahlias
- MiniBeckia Flame
- Nepeta SylvesterBlue
- Lagerstroemia GreatMyrtle

What makes these and future varieties attractive to consumers? In our new norm, with everyone staying at home and self-isolating, gardening is taking on a more important role. For those of us who are fortunate enough to have gardens, small or large, these varieties will fit well into our landscapes. More importantly, all these varieties offer superb container presentation so they're very suitable for patio or balcony situations. Vigorous plants with large

blooms that flower prolifically are a welcome addition to any environment.

How will growers have confidence they can produce these products with limited shrink and maximum profitability? For any new variety to succeed in the marketplace, it takes many years of breeder selections and much trialing to ensure that it will be head-and-shoulders above the others in its class. Seedlings must perform well in the breeder's greenhouse before they can be sent to a propagator for further production testing.

We at Pioneer have the responsibility of making sure that cuttings can be produced according to our biological propagation protocols. Will these varieties respond to our propagation PGR treatments so that growth-controlled, well-branched cuttings are produced for other growers? Our experience so far has been very positive, but sometimes, certain environmental factors may be limited in our location, so it's important to use industry relationships to help create the correct growing conditions to expedite the growing calendar. Cuttings may be easily rooted in a northern greenhouse, but as in the case of lagerstroemia, Florida heat and light may be the catalyst needed to reduce the growing time in a trialing production schedule.

Final production temperature, lighting, PGRs and fertilization requirements all need to be considered, and by the aid of some specialized growth trials at selected production nurseries, a specific variety growing blueprint can be created for each species. It's GardenChoice's responsibility to communicate with the final growers and provide them with this essential production information to ensure their success.

Producing a new variety in the greenhouse is one thing, but trialing in a commercial environment is also vitally important. This is why testing growth responses in different climate zone trial grounds is an essential part of the "bringing-to-market" process. As can be appreciated, time is an important factor. Once a new variety checks all potential commercial boxes, consideration has to be given to "large-scale" cutting production of the specific variety.

Bareroot material can easily be produced in Pioneer's field production acreage. Commercial growth trials at industry-quality growers need to be carried out and clean, virus-indexed, and cutting production processes need to be put in operation. Ideally, a large offshore cutting production operation needs to be an integral member of the team alliance so that an adequate supply of clean material can be provided to young plant production facilities.

GardenChoice has recently gone through this part of team building and production processes are in place for the above-mentioned varieties. By following recommended biological pest and disease practices, growers in the production chain will have the confidence, with additional company support as necessary, to produce product that will give customers years of enjoyment from these new exciting varieties. **GT**

Roger McGaughey, head grower at Pioneer Gardens in Deerfield, Massachusetts, was educated in Northern Ireland and England and has 47 years experience as a grower.