

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Mums From Above

Jennifer Zurko

The view of Lucas Greenhouses' annual mum trial from a scissor lift on a sunny fall day is both pleasant and a bit shaky at the same time. (That's only because this editor doesn't care for heights.) But it's the best way to see all 430 varieties displayed from Syngenta, Ball, Dümmen Orange and Gediflora.

Finished Plant Production Trial Coordinator Jason Szymanski said Lucas has been hosting a mum trial for more than 20 years. It's when broker and breeder reps come from all over the country to see what's new and to do their own evaluations on what they think are the best varieties for their customers.

"Lucas doesn't have its own sales force, so we depend on them to help us sell the product," he explained. "It's a great tool not just for us, but for everyone in the industry."

Jason said that to really get the full picture of any mum trial, you've got to come back four different times to see how the varieties look during their peak timing.

And as for what the breeders have been focused on during the past few years—based on requests from growers—it's better disease resistance (especially for white rust, Fusarium and Pythium) and a better, stronger plant form.

Total, Jason said that Lucas grew over 700,000 garden mums for their IGC and grocery store customers this season, along with other fall items that have become regular accompaniments to mums, like pansies, and ornamental kale and peppers.

Using Bossman Beytes' "Grower Rating Scale" from his annual Acres Online spring survey, I asked Jason to rate this year's mum season and he gave it a 7. The hot, dry summer that plagued the Northeast made finishing mums a challenge, but not above and beyond what they're normally used to. And even increasing prices this year didn't cause any of their customers to balk—they were still selling in late September.

"I think the days of selling mums 3 for \$10 are over," said Jason, and it doesn't seem like anyone will miss it.

Lucas also hosts a poinsettia trial and this will be the event's fourth year where they grow hundreds of different cultivars in 6.5- and 8.5-in. pots. This year's trials will be open for visitors from November 29 – December 1. **GT**

