



Bulletin

The Information Source for the Floriculture Industry Since 1929

CIRCULATE

Passion, Money, and Poinsettias



PJ Ellison
Ellison's Greenhouses Inc.
 2107 E Stone Street
 Brenham, TX 77833
 979-836-6011
 Fax: 979-830-1455

I may be a rarity in the industry in that I truly love poinsettias. I love the challenges they present, and I love the beauty they give. For all of negative publicity poinsettias receive, they are one of the best things that ever happened to Ellison's Greenhouses Inc. Maybe the reason for this is that at Ellison's, the poinsettia has always been a money-making crop. It has been the crop that truly defines good versus excellent among our growers and customers. It is also the crop that literally put us in the consumer's mind in our region and in trade and consumer publica-

tions throughout the nation. On a very personal side, it was a crop of poinsettias that brought me back to the industry after being away from it for 15 years. In short, I am truly passionate about poinsettias. I love what they continue to do for Ellison's and what Ellison's does for them.

In 1990, we started the annual Poinsettia Celebration. It was designed to bring the general public to our wholesale greenhouses so they could view the beauty we saw every day. Let's face it, how many

people actually get to see acres of poinsettias in full color? It is as breathtaking for them as it is for us. We also decided that we would offer poinsettias for sale to offset the cost of getting people to the event, as well as entertaining them while they were here. This year we will host our 11th Annual Poinsettia Celebration, which will bring in 4,000 to 5,000 consumers, as well as many wholesale customers. This Celebration is the largest part of how we market our poinsettias

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SMALL BUSINESS AND THE 107th CONGRESS



Jeanne M. Little
Society of American Florists
 1601 Duke Street
 Alexandria, VA 22314
 703-836-8700

Editor's Note: Jeanne M. Little has left SAF to become Finance Director for the re-election campaign of Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine).

Small business scored big early in the first session of the historic 107th Congress. Two top small business issues to receive early favorable attention included ergonomics and death tax repeal. How did these two major legislative victories happen? Why did they take so long? Was it really long in the world of politics and policy? The answers are multifaceted, and OFA and its members had a hand in making both victories possible. Small business issues were enjoying unprecedented success, until the train went off the tracks in early June.

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OFA

An Association of Floriculture Professionals

Our mission is to assist the floriculture industry in being competitive, profitable, and responsive to its needs.

(As adopted by the OFA Board of Directors 2/18/01)



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2130 Stella Court, Suite 200

Columbus, Ohio 43215-1033 USA

614-487-1117 Fax: 614-487-1216

e-mail: ofa@ofa.org home page: www.ofa.org

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EDITORIAL STAFF

MICHELLE GASTON
Editor

LAURA KUNKLE
Managing Editor

MELANIE WILT
Managing Editor

STEPHEN CARVER
Technical Editor

PETER KONJOIAN
Technical Adviser

DENNIS KIRVEN
Executive Director

CONTRIBUTORS

- KARL BATSCHKE • BRIDGET K. BEHE
- PJ ELLISON • HARVEY LANG
- JEANNE M. LITTLE • JUSTIN MAROTTA
- ED MIKKELSEN • RICK PAYNTER
- JACK WILLIAMS

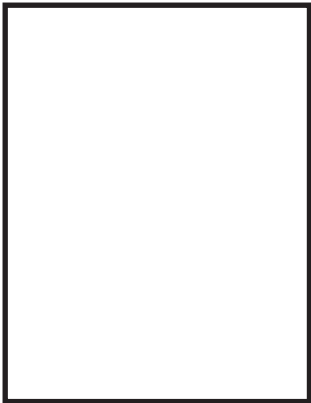
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POINSETTIA NOVELTY VARIETIES: UNDERSTANDING THEIR NICHE

Bridget K. Behe
*Michigan State University
216 Plant & Soil Sciences Bldg
East Lansing, MI 48824
517-432-2450
Fax: 517-353-0890
behe@msu.edu*



What is the first thing that typically comes to mind when you see a poinsettia? Christmas! Does it make a difference what color the plant is? Who buys the novelty varieties and are they somehow different from the buyers of red poinsettias? Who purchases poinsettia plants and why? For many of the same reasons, small pines, spruces, and firs are brought in annually – to decorate the American home for the holidays. The Christmas tree, like the poinsettia, is a living, yet temporary, disposable home decoration that is used annually for reasons of nostalgia and tradition.

The USDA reported that in 2000 the value of the whole poinsettia crop for that season was \$237.328 million (wholesale) and that slightly more than 65 million units were sold (NASS, 2001). It represents an increase of 5.4% in units grown in 1999 and 4.6% in wholesale value. That's nearly one poinsettia in every other American home. Poinsettias have outsold chrysanthemums (a year-round staple) for 30+ years to become the number one selling potted plant in the United States. The poinsettia plant has become the highest wholesale value floral crop produced in the United States, and plant breeders are continually trying to develop plants that will not only keep poinsettias on top, but also expand the market. Advances in plant breeding technology have allowed horticulturists to develop various shades of red, as well as other colors, along with various forms.

About 70% of poinsettias produced every year are red, with the other 30% being the newer novelty colors such as white, pink, and variegated. The vast majority of poinsettia consumers, however, still prefer reds. In one study performed by ABC News in 1998, after red, white is the most preferred poinsettia color. Another study done at Michigan State University in 1998 ranks pink as the second most preferred color. As far as novelty colors go, research does not conclusively show which color the public prefers. Research does show, however, that red is always a favorite.

So, who buys poinsettias? A study we completed in 1995 (Behe, Redman, and Dole, 1997) showed that 65% were

female, 20% were male (15% of the study participants chose not to answer the question). Age ranged from 20 to 95 years, with an average of 55.3 years. Number of persons living in the household ranged from 1 to 9, with an average of 2 persons. The income category with the greatest percentage of responses was over \$90,000 (13%), followed by \$40,000 to \$49,999 (11%) and \$60,000 to \$69,999 (11%). Median household income was between \$40,000 and \$49,999. This creates a profile of a poinsettia purchaser who is likely female from a middle- to upper-income household, not unlike the typical gardener.

Also in this study, we found that 67% of the study participants had purchased a poinsettia the year prior, 23% did not, and 10% chose not to respond. Forty-four percent had purchased a red poinsettia that year, 15% had purchased a pink poinsettia, 10% had purchased a white poinsettia, 11% had purchased a multi-colored poinsettia, and 6% had purchased a salmon or peach colored poinsettia. These are one snapshot of the colors, but show the dominance of red. The purchase of novelty colors may be a bit higher than typical, since participants did come voluntarily to view a display of poinsettias. They may be slightly more interested in poinsettias than the general public.

As a market researcher, one of the more interesting findings from that study, and shown in subsequent studies, is that most consumers cannot easily differentiate between the cultivars. This was incredibly clear when we compared cultivars within a color. One red was just like another to them. One pink was just like all the rest. However, some of the participants could, and did, differentiate novelty cultivars from others. These novelty cultivars truly were different. Yet, knowing that consumers can differentiate cultivars is only one step to marketing them.

Think about the position in which this realization placed commercial greenhouses and poinsettia retailers. Without product differentiation that consumers reported, poinsettias became homogenous – they became a commodity. You and I might be able to distinguish cultivars, but without seeing differences between cultivars from the consumer's perspective, poinsettias could be considered a commodity. Commodities are priced near cost, severely limiting their profitability unless you sell massive quantities. Profits are made on volume, not on gross margin.

However, when a perceived difference emerges, even for a niche of consumers, growers and retailers have the basis for increasing price and profits. Why? Some people are willing to pay more for "new," while most aren't as willing to pay for "improved" products. New products are novel and unlike others on the market. Consumers can tell you how those products differ. Some must have the latest and greatest and are willing to pay for that. In a speciality poinsettia market, some commercial greenhouses and retailers have capitalized on differentiating their poinsettias by size or container. They are able to command premium prices because they grow poinsettias in large sizes or unique containers.

Marketers may have been a bit too conservative in some areas when they introduced some truly new novelty cultivars. 'Monet' stole the show several years ago and 'Winter Rose' is



a big hit now. Some consumers may have been willing to pay a premium price for these novelty cultivars because they were not "commodities" or mainstream. When these novelty cultivars first enter the market, they

begin their product life-cycle (Figure 1, page 4). The first phase is the introduction phase that shows that sales are growing but profits are negative. That is most likely due to the fact that those first people to make the purchase are considered Innovators. The Product Adoption Curve (Figure 2, page 4) shows how the percentage of people who buy any product over time grows. Innovators characteristically are willing to pay a premium price for new products. We have gardening Innovators who may have been very likely to pay a premium price for new poinsettia novelty cultivars.

During the growth phase of the product life cycle, most of the Early Adopters are buying products and some of the Early Majority are beginning to buy them. Characteristically, Early Adopters want the latest and greatest, and are more willing to pay a premium price than the Early Majority but less likely to pay for it than the Innovators. By the time the Late Majority and Laggards have entered the marketplace and are buying products, competition is fierce. The product has entered the maturity stage of the product life cycle and profits are declining. The only thing to re-start this product life cycle is the new and improved. That's why we constantly see "new and improved" products on the supermarket shelf. That's also why we're usually not impressed when we see those words. If they (manufacturers) need to tell us it's new and improved, we usually can't differentiate it from the older product form. So without product differentiation, we can't get the price/profits up because we can't re-start the product life cycle.

Not all consumers will want the novelty cultivars – we still must supply the Late Majority and Laggards with the familiar red cultivars. There is a market for them, but it is not as profitable as the market that Innovators and Early Adopters create. When a new novelty cultivar comes onto the scene, one that truly can be differentiated (not a "new and improved" red cultivar), the opportunity exists to charge a premium price. Price should consider not only cost (as we all too often do in the horticulture industry) but should also consider what consumers, or a niche of consumers, consider the value of that product to be. Many florists and some garden centers have realized this and are able to create added value (demanding higher prices and earning greater margins).

Part of creating the "bottom line," as well as the main point of the article, is to consider the market before pricing the product. There are some consumers willing to pay a premium price for new novelty poinsettias. Red may always be preferred, but identifying those Innovators and Early Adopters is key to finding the niche who will pay the premium price. Retailers may have some ideas on who they are, but we have no research to indicate their characteristics. With new novelty cultivars, the industry can find the easier means to stimulating sales of this beloved traditional holiday symbol.

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Figure 1. Product life cycle.

Hobson, K. 1998. "Beating the Poison Pen." ABCnews. <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/business/DailyNews/poinsettia981207>



Figure 2. Product adoption curve.

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OFA

PASSION, MONEY, AND POINSETTIAS

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to the consumer and to our customers.

What started out as a "feel good" event has become the poinsettia educational event for our region. We have people that come every year because they want to see the newest trial varieties, and they want to purchase the different varieties and sizes. They also come because they want to visit first-hand with the breeders. They love learning and seeing what is not available to purchase this year but could be the next year if they voice their opinions. Breeders also view the Celebration as a valuable tool because they get instant feedback from the consumers. Our customers like it because they can visit with the consumers, see the newest varieties, and know what to order for the following year. We like it because we know what to grow for the next year and what to tell our customers will be

big sellers the following year. Our team likes the Celebration because they can invite family and friends. Year after year, they vote to host the Celebration because of the pride they have in it and in Ellison's – even if it comes at a very busy time of year.

When I mentioned earlier that we made money on poinsettias, it is because we do not treat poinsettias as a commodity crop. To us, the poinsettia is a specialty crop that should be utilized to its fullest extent and it should make us money. Therefore, we do not grow a 6-inch poinsettia. We grow a 6.5-inch and every size from a 2.5-inch to a 6-foot by 6-foot. We specialize in larger poinsettias in many different containers.

One of our greatest feats of poinsettia growing is our "Texas Size." Carl Enge, our production manager, developed this poinsettia seven years ago. At the time, he

wanted to grow something special for the Poinsettia Celebration. Our Texas Size poinsettia is a grower's nightmare and a sales person's dream. We knew we had hit a home run when Jack Williams of The Paul Ecke Ranch was impressed and said he had never seen anything like it. Year after year, these are still the number one crowd pleaser, and thousands of pictures with Santa have been taken with these 6-foot marvels. After the Celebration, the Texas Size are sold to interiorscapes, hotels, resorts, banks, and

other businesses. They have definitely secured our reputation for being a niche producer; and sometimes, other people pay for our publicity. One Texas Size is purchased by a local beverage distributor and donated to the George Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas. The sign on it says, "Donated by Mike and Nina Hopkins and Mike Hopkins Distributing Co. and grown by Ellison's Greenhouses Inc. in Brenham, Texas." Another goes into a bank in a small town, which calls the local paper as soon as it



arrives. Not only is the front page filled with a picture and information on the Texas Size, people come by the bank all day to see it and have their picture taken with the "largest poinsettia in Texas." Great PR!

We also grow more varieties and colors. It is a challenge for production, but, because we are a niche producer, we have to grow more than the traditional red, white, and pink. Our customers look to us for the unusual sizes and colors. They look to us to help them make money and compete. They look to us to keep them ahead of the game. We use the results of the Celebration to do all of these.

Just a bit of advice on doing an "open house," festival, or Celebration from one whom has done it the hard way. Go visit the places doing these events well and do your homework. We could have saved ourselves a lot of time, money, and energy had we investigated. At the time, and even now,

it is hard to find someone doing exactly what we are doing. Ours is truly becoming an industry and consumer event for this region ... as it should. Putting on an event like the Celebration is an art, science, and huge undertaking. In this article, I have barely touched on what the Celebration is and how it works. If you would like more information, I welcome you to visit us this November 17 and 18 to see the Poinsettia Celebration first-hand. I will also, gladly, answer any questions that you may have.

People have asked me why we do the Celebration as a wholesale grower. They ask about the crazy time of the year and the resources to do the Celebration. I am sometimes amazed at the questions. My amazement is simple. If we truly want to grow for the consumer and not what we want to sell them, we must invest the resources to listen to them. We cannot just talk the talk. We must walk the walk. Our industry is great at growing great product. It is not so



great in knowing if it is growing the product for which the consumer will pay top dollar. It is my wish that more non-poinsettia breeders will join the Celebration and utilize the work we have already done. It is a perfect vehicle to get consumer feedback immediately.

It is also my wish that there be regional Celebrations with industry participation so the consumer can dictate what we grow year to year. And maybe, just maybe, we would not have to have any crop as a commodity crop. Imagine that!



OFA

SMALL BUSINESS AND THE 107th CONGRESS

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It might be useful to go back in time over the tumultuous last few months. Before the Memorial Day recess, Congress was intensely busy trying to pass the \$1.35 trillion tax cut. The Administration, at the same time, unveiled its National Energy Policy, and a few members announced they were leaving Congress. The biggest upheaval came when Senator Jim Jeffords, a moderate Republican Senator from Vermont, announced his decision to leave the Republican Party and become an Independent. Fortunately, before the defection, Congress overturned Clinton's ergonomics regulation and passed President Bush's \$1.35 trillion tax plan, which included a top SAF priority – Death Tax Repeal. Senator Jeffords' decision not only dealt a major blow to President Bush's agenda, but to many of the plans the business community had envisioned for more tax relief and defeat of employer liability in healthcare, a different approach to energy policy, and a myriad of other issues whose fate now is less certain.

First, let's focus on the wins – pre-Jeffords switch:

ERGONOMICS

SAF identified the proposed ergonomics issue as a threat to the floral industry back in 1995. While most of the floral industry strongly recognizes the importance of a safe and healthy workplace, the ergonomics regulation, as written, was deadly. Simply put, it would have made all employers liable for injuries aggravated, but not caused by work, and imposed the lowest threshold of a single injury to trigger the requirement to implement an ergonomics program in your business.

Over the past six years, SAF has worked together with others in the business community to stop, slow, or try to constructively channel OSHA's regulatory process. A key component of that effort was the silver bullet – grassroots. This year, the stars aligned, and with the help of OFA, we prevailed. Using the untested Congressional Review Act, the House and Senate voted decisively to overturn the ergonomics regulation, and President Bush signed the law before March.

OFA and its members deserve a great debt of thanks. The Ohio Florists' Association was a key player in the effort and strategy that delivered the death knell to the Clinton ergonomics regulation. At key points in the process over a decade, floral industry members responded to the call for letters to the Senate, followed by letters to the House, followed by letters and more letters. The industry's calls, letters, and

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faxes to the Hill were key. Education was key to activating the industry – and produced impassioned letters to key lawmakers. Specifically, SAF received copies of letters from nearly 60 new contacts to the Senate and House from members of the Ohio Florists' Association at a critical juncture, swinging the Senate vote on the Joint Resolution to nullify the ergonomics regulation.

The Washington Post ran a story the day after the House voted. The message was that if we (the business community) stick together and speak with one voice, there is no end to what we can do, and this week proved it. One Democratic staffer said that for every one labor letter they got, they received 10 business letters. The business community beat labor at its own game.

But even as we savor the taste of victory, labor is pushing the newly installed Labor Secretary Elaine Chao to address repetitive stress injuries in the workplace. The Secretary called for four ergonomics forums in July – two were held in Washington D.C., one in Chicago, and a fourth in California. SAF was present at the Washington D.C. forums to communicate the concerns of floriculture. Secretary Chao announced in June that she would make a decision in September on developing a comprehensive approach to ergonomics. This may seem like a defeat, but it is not. The Congressional Review Act, which Congress used to overturn the ergonomics rule, states that any new rule cannot look substantially similar to the nullified rule. What we won now is an opportunity to talk to a Labor Department sympathetic to the views of the business community and work together to pursue a process for dealing with the issue.

DEATH TAX REPEAL

On May 26, 2001 – both the House and Senate, in a rare Saturday session, passed the \$1.35 trillion tax cut. The "Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001" represents the largest tax cut approved by Congress in 20 years.

This tax cut is a victory for floriculture. It puts more money in consumer's pockets by lowering tax rates. Most importantly it phases out the estate tax, long a burden on small business owners in the floral industry who often have to sell or liquidate their businesses to pay estate taxes. Here again, is an example of the time and effort necessary to make a change in law. The Family Business Estate Tax Coalition was formed several years ago to bring together companies and business trade groups to join resource – grassroots especially – to mobilize and influence Congress to act on this issue. OFA and its members have consistently stepped up to the plate to help repeal the death tax. Former OFA President and a member of the SAF Government Relations Committee, Gordy Perkins, testified on behalf of SAF and the floral industry before the Senate Finance Committee back in 1997. He led the charge in calling OFA and SAF members to action and many wrote and personally lobbied their lawmakers and ultimately we won the fight.

While the death tax repeal provision does bump up the exemption and lower the rates over 10 years, you can be sure the business community will come back to Congress in the next year to press for more rapid phase out of the tax rates, a further increase in the unified credit, and to ensure that repeal is permanent. Grassroots again will be key to our success.

Why do these letters matter? Grassroots action is the sil-

ver bullet in winning an issue on the Hill. Grassroots is the muscle that turns the tide your way or not. Letters are read and counted and provide the "cover" our allies on the Hill need, while letters to opponents of our position act as a loud voice putting them on notice that a vote against is a vote against an active and vocal constituency who will remember on election day.

DEMOCRATS TAKE CONTROL OF THE SENATE – SMALL BUSINESS AGENDA SLOWED

Small business' agenda suffered a setback in early June when Senator James Jeffords made the decision to leave the Republican Party. June 6, 2001 marked a whole new agenda in the Senate 50-49-1 (at press time). New Majority Leader Tom Daschle, (D-S.D.), pledged a spirit of "bipartisanship" in the new chamber and called "polarized positions... an indulgence that the Senate cannot afford." Senator Trent Lott, (R-Miss.), now the minority leader, offered Daschle "my hand of continued friendship and commitment to work with him for the interest of the American people."

Despite this tone of conciliation, the change of control will bring with it a major shift in the Senate's agenda and the President's ability to get his initiatives through Congress. Now Democrats can bring up a number of bills that might otherwise have languished. A patient's bill of rights that would allow employers to be sued is one of the key concerns of the business community as a result of the shift. Democrats will also seek an increase in the minimum wage with few, if any, tax cuts attached, and finally, the Democrats will also push an energy plan that places more emphasis on conservation than the White House energy plan. The shift in power also means a new chairman for each of the Senate's committees. Now the Democrats have the responsibility of governing and the President has lost a Senate able to manage his agenda.

MINIMUM WAGE

Given the change in guard in the Senate, grassroots will be again be key on a minimum wage increase. Senator Lott and Senator Daschle had already discussed a procedure to bring a wage hike up for debate. But now, with Senator Daschle as Majority Leader, it is a different ball game. Had the Republicans retained control, the makeup of a minimum wage hike would have included substantial tax relief and additional labor law reform – including possibly inside sales reform legislation critical to wholesalers.

At press time, Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), the new Chairman of the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP), reintroduced his \$1.50 minimum wage hike legislation, S. 964, and placed it directly on the Senate calendar. Senator Kennedy's proposal is a 29 percent increase over 25 months and includes no tax relief to mitigate the impact on small businesses. SAF believes there should be tax cuts and regulatory relief provisions attached to any minimum wage increase. In addition, Senator Kennedy's dramatic wage hike could have significant adverse effects on weaker local economies.

SAF will work throughout the year on opposing the Kennedy wage hike and, instead, will work for a compromise similar to what would have been brought up under Republican control. The planned Republican bill would have provided a \$1 increase over two years and contain vital tax relief, including repeal of the outdated 0.2 percent FUTA surtax, immediate full deductibility of health insurance for the self-employed, and an increase in the business meals deduction, among other things. Given the balance of power in the Senate, it is possible that

Senator Daschle will be open to small business tax relief to offset the costs of a minimum wage increase. It is certain by the time you read this, significant grassroots pressure will be brought to influence the amount and rate at which the wage is increased, as well as the importance of including tax relief.

ENERGY

If the Republicans still had control of the Senate in June, Senator Lott would have focused the Senate's attention on the next item on President Bush's agenda - the energy issue. The energy crisis is a major threat to small businesses in floriculture. The crisis is hitting small businesses on their bottom line. Instead of investing, purchasing new computer equipment, or hiring extra employees, or advertising, income is diverted to paying higher energy bills. SAF heard directly from members during Congressional Action Days about the impact of the current energy market - and has moved to weigh in with Congress.

President Bush unveiled his National Energy Policy on May 17, 2001, zeroing in on overregulation and increasing domestic energy supply, as well as attempting to upgrade the nation's infrastructure after years of neglect. Unfortunately, there is no "quick-fix" solution to the country's energy problems. Now with Democrats in control of the Senate, the President's plan faces an uphill battle. The House plans to have legislation ready for floor debate by July. SAF will continue to actively lobby key members of Congress who must understand this is a small business issue, and the costs in the short term are lethal.

PATIENT'S BILL OF RIGHTS

Here is another example of the power of the majority. With Democrats in control of the Senate, new Majority Leader Tom Daschle has announced he will bring the Kennedy-McCain patient's bill of rights legislation to the floor as soon as the Senate finishes the education bill.

The Kennedy-McCain bill could have a devastating impact on the employer-based health care system by exposing health plans and employers to a rash of costly new lawsuits.

Managed care reform has been a contentious issue in

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Congress for the past five years. Last year, the House overwhelmingly passed the Norwood-Dingell bill, which included numerous mandates that would have increased the cost of health insurance. Fortunately, the business community defeated the Senate version by a one-vote margin and employers escaped this harmful legislation.

This year, employers face a far greater threat if a patient's bill of rights is enacted. Democrats picked up five seats in the last election, giving the Kennedy-McCain supporters more than the 50 votes needed for passage. In addition, the shift in control of the Senate gives Daschle and Kennedy (the new chairman of the Senate Labor Committee) the power to bring the bill directly to the floor.

President Bush has said he would veto the bill in its current form. President Bush prefers a bill that would require patients to initially go to an independent medical reviewer instead of to federal court.

SAF opposes this bill because, while the objectives are worthwhile, no one is discussing the costs. The Congressional Budget Office projects such approaches would increase premiums for employer-sponsored health plans by an average of 4.2 percent. Many in the small business community think the costs will exceed the estimates. Even without these bills, the costs of healthcare are out of control.

Having said all that, the new word is "compromise," and in the new Senate, more compromise will be necessary. By the time you read this, we'll all know how that word is being defined - and redefined - by the 107th Congress. But stay tuned - your involvement is more important than it has ever been.

OFA

NEW NOVELTY POINSETTIA CULTIVAR FROM OGLEVEE LTD

Ed Mikkelsen
Oglevee Ltd.
152 Oglevee Lane
Connellsville, PA 15425
724-628-8360
Fax: 724-628-7270

As the name implies, 'Early Joy Pink' is a very early season (7-1/2 week) cultivar. It is the earliest pink poinsettia available. With clear

pink bracts similar to the color of V-14 Pink, it does not have the strong appearance of veins that some pinks exhibit. The leaves are dark green. Both the leaves and bracts look good in natural, incandescent, and fluorescent light. The cultivar has good post harvest performance showing no epinasty after being boxed for three days,

exhibiting no bract bruising, and having good leaf retention.

THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS ARE BENEFICIAL FOR THE GROWER

'Early Joy Pink' branches moderately well from a pinch with branches coming from most of the nodes. Bracts are very large and cover the

whole plant canopy. It is resistant to bract edge burn, but it does fade. Plants have upright lower branches that resist breakage during sleeving and shipping. Not only will the plants finish early without blackcloth, they are also resistant to heat delay. 'Early Joy Pink' requires little to no growth regulation, and will be available in 2002. **OFA**

Top New Novelties from Paul Ecke Ranch

Jack Williams
Paul Ecke Ranch
P.O. Box 230488
Encinitas, CA 92023-0488
760-944-4060
Fax: 760-944-4002
jwilliams@eckeranch.com

We are all learning that "novelty" poinsettias, whether these are unique colors, shapes, or foliage types, have great appeal to consumers. Red may rule in overall volume, but those other poinsettia colors and types are popular and should not be overlooked. So let's look at some opportunities available to growers and retailers.

Winter Rose™ (Figure 1) is more than just a red. Today, color sports from this incredibly popular poinsettia have expanded the range to include white, pink, marble, and jingle bells. Growers have learned that Winter Rose can be grown in sizes that range from miniatures in 3-inch pots to topiary trees (they are especially nice in the miniature tree form described on page 14). Although this poinsettia series does branch when pinched, the use of Florel® can improve the overall branch count, and, through its growth-regulating effect, help even out the branch

position and development. Do not over-water Winter Rose, as the smaller curled leaves do not provide the same surface area as other cultivars for transpiration rates to be similar. If watered on the same schedule as other cultivars, root rots and other problems related to the soil being too wet are likely to occur. To maximize bract size, do not spray plant growth regulators (PGRs) as late as is done with other cultivars. We suggest that all applications be completed by the start of short days. When grown properly, Winter Rose has the best post-production life of any poinsettia in the market,

which makes lots of happy customers who repeat their purchase season after season.

Plum Pudding™ (Figure 2) was released commercially this season and is being compared to Winter Rose for anticipated consumer reaction. Growers have seen or heard about this cultivar for two years now because of the early testing and evaluation at universities and trial sites around the world. Plum Pudding has deep, mauve-purple bracts that look almost artificial. In fact, craft stores around the country sell fake poinsettias



Figure 1. Winter Rose.



Figure 2. Plum Pudding.



Figure 3. Jester.



Figure 4. Jester Red.

this exact color, so now consumers will be able to use live poinsettias in their holiday decorating. Plum Pudding can be grown with the same schedule and culture as Peterstar types. To maximize bract expansion and color, finish Plum Pudding warmer (68°F/20°C night temperature) and provide light shading over the crop. One tip to consider: display Plum Pudding next to pink poinsettias for the very best effect!

Another novelty poinsettia trialed in the market and getting lots of attention is the Jester™ (Figures 3 and 4) family. The original Jester is a Jingle Bells type, but now red and pink sports have expanded this to create a series. The name came from Jesters' leaves and bracts that are very upright and resemble a court jester's hat. Hence, the name! Jester may be scheduled and grown like Freedom™ or Pepride™. It does share the early (eight-week) blooming response time of these other dark leaf cultivars and can be timed using lights as well. Jester branches prolifically and should not be given applications of Florel like the Winter Rose. If finished warm, (68°F/20°C night temperature) the bracts will not stand up as strongly as is

possible when grown and finished like Freedom. The series can be used for a range of product forms, but look best when produced in miniatures (2 1/2 to 3-inch pots), as 4 to 4 1/2-inch pots or as anything up to 8-inch pots.

Strawberries 'N Cream™ (Figure 5) is a new poinsettia being trialed in North America this season. This poinsettia is a relative of the Pepride family, so it will require more time to grow when used in larger pot sizes or forms. Strawberries 'N Cream is extremely free branching and should not be treated with Florel. In fact, the slow growth characteristic of this poinsettia will allow growers to produce it with little, if any, plant growth regulators. As the creamy-white bracts expand the intense pink color begins to form and gets larger as the plant matures. Like other series with smaller leaves, this cultivar will need to be watered less frequently than "normal" poinsettias and should be placed in a good, warm spot in your greenhouse for best results. If using this in 6-inch pots, be sure to start and pinch the crop two weeks earlier than you would Pepride or Freedom to achieve the desired height. This plant is definitely not a mainstream poinsettia but is a guaran-



teed eye catcher for retailers!

An addition to the Freedom™ family of poinsettias is Freedom Fireworks™.

The dark red bracts and green leaves of this cultivar are thin and serrated, which creates the look of fireworks exploding in the sky. Because it is a member of the Freedom family, this novelty cultivar can be grown along with this series with no special requirements. Like Strawberries 'N Cream, Freedom Fireworks will be available for growers to trial this season.

Monet™ and Monet Twilight™ continue to be top consumer favorites. Although these novelties have been in the market for a few years already, they continue to be rated as some of the top poinsettias in consumer displays around the country. Likewise, the variegated foliage types (Heirloom™ family [Figure 6], Peterstar™, Silverbells, and Holly Point™) also

score well with consumers. None have been grown in such large quantities that market saturation has been reached yet, so take advantage of their popularity while it is still on the rise. The variegated types are all slow growing due to their leaf characteristics (variegation = less chlorophyll), so be sure to provide additional growth time and less growth regulation when producing these poinsettias.

Winter Rose was one of the first poinsettias that proved consumers do purchase unique cultivars in addition to their "normal" poinsettias. Increased consumption and higher prices – now those are words we all like seeing linked with this crop! When it comes to generating interest and additional sales, novelties like those described above are where it's at! Look for these poinsettias in the market this year, as they will definitely create some noise with retailers and consumers alike.



Figure 5. Strawberries 'N Cream.



Figure 6. Heirloom Peach.

DUMMEN NOVELTY POINSETTIAS 'CHAMPAGNE' AND 'COCO PINK'

Rick Paynter
Dummen USA
8429 S Lake Ketchum Rd
Stanwood, WA 98292
360-629-7788
Fax: 360-629-7766
dummenusa@aol.com

When most growers and retailers talk about the poinsettia season they had last year, a common theme develops: novelty poinsettias are becoming more important to their mix. They are by no means threatening the share that red dominates, but the numbers are climbing and cannot be ignored.

Here are two of Dummen's highly recommended non-red varieties:

'CHAMPAGNE'

'Champagne' combines consistency and ease of growing with a beautiful color. "Apricot" is the best way to describe the color. The boldly toned, slightly mottled bracts are highlighted above dark green foliage. Full, long lasting cyathia accentuate the color and an upright V-shape gives 'Champagne' a very desirable, upscale look.

'Champagne' is a great Thanksgiving-Christmas variety. The color is unique, and it finishes in just 7-1/2 weeks. It gives the consumer something different for early decorating or to give as a gift.

Another feature of 'Champagne' is its dark green foliage. This is what the consumer is looking for. Finally, it has excellent shipping and extended shelf life characteristics.

'Champagne' is naturally free-breaking and branching at every axillary. Because of its breaking consistency, there is no need to leave extra nodes or do labor-intensive leaf removal. Spacing is recommended when leaf touching occurs. 'Champagne' is suitable for all pot sizes. Allow one or two extra weeks if large containers are desired.

'COCO PINK'

'Coco pink' has been described at university trials as the "most important dark green leaf pink in the industry."

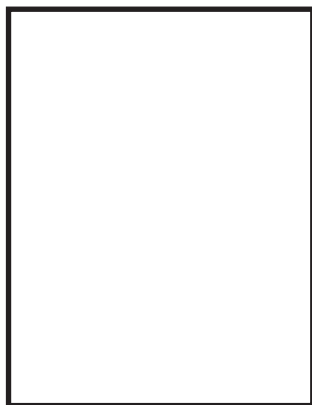
It stands out among other pinks due to the intensity of the color on all bracts – there is no fading on the older bracts. Being part of a series is a big advantage to add 'Coco Pink' to your mix. 'Coco 2000' (red) and 'Coco White' are available and complete a very solid, early finishing 7 to 7-1/2 week series.

'Coco Pink' exhibits medium to strong growth habits. It is suitable for production in all pot sizes, the plants are symmetrical, and display uniform branching. It is upright in growth and does not tend to widen, which makes it ideal for sleeving and shipping.

To ensure Coco develops every shoot to the top, we recommend watering the plant two to three times after pinching with 2.5 ounces/10 gallon calcium nitrate. Start the cycocel application early in order to promote the development of the lower bracts.

OFA

Novelty Varieties Keep Customers Wondering: What Will We Do Next?



Justin Marotta
Possum Run Greenhouses
5384 Possum Run Road
Bellville, OH 44813
419-892-2770
Fax: 419-892-2476
possum@possumrunglehouse.com

Unusual, colorful, unique, and well-grown. Couple these with past growing styles (not my immediate past but that of my father and grandfather), and you have what we do at Possum Run Greenhouse.

We have approached things a little differently in the past few years, and that is growing not only good quality reds, whites, and pinks, but adding many of the novelty types to keep the public wondering what we will grow next, while satisfying their thirst. I can remember in the mid-70s when we first grew a marble poinsettia and found that they were difficult to give

away. Today, if we err and do not grow adequate amounts of the marble, jingle style, and variegated foliage, we potentially lose sales. All the later styles of poinsettias have tremendous appeal to the homeowner, especially the woman of the home as we have found that poinsettias add to the Christmas and Holiday season for the home or office.

Also while growing the novelty varieties, we have not forgotten the reds, whites, and pinks for these we have resorted to the past. Today nearly 40 percent of our production is in straight up pots. This style of growing returns to our historic

past while growing up in this industry and finding that much of what our forefathers did was of excellent value for the consumer. By returning to this style of growing, we have increased sales as people exclaim how large the bract is and sturdy the plant. It provides us a tremendous advantage over the box stores, as our customers value our plant for this purpose – longevity, style, and form.

We primarily grow poinsettias for our own retail location. "Off the beaten path" you might say, is putting it mildly, yet our poinsettia sales have experienced consistently slight

growth. Striving to maintain this growth, we always work to display plants in interior settings, as well as bench sale settings. We feel our setting is unique, which allows us to take full advantage of unique poinsettias – leading me into the Winter Rose style of poinsettia.

Propagating poinsettias allows us the liberty to finish stock plants for large container and floor style. We feel that the Winter Rose is absolutely magnificent finished in this manner. The sheer beauty of the plant, with its rich color against deep green foliage, is stunning. While having many of the stock pots displayed, we have many other sizes available, contributing to the overall sale of this cultivar. Not only do we see success in growing Winter Rose from stock to finish, but have also succeeded with the varieties of Silverstar Red and Pink. The large, robust

plants encouraged sales of the 6- and 7-inch plants equally as well.

When we talk about these different varieties of plants – the new dark leaf or the variegated foliage types – the most asked question is, “Will it grow and be maintained the same as the red?” So, we as growers must educate and communicate to the consumer at all times and with honesty. We say “yes!”

Pot sizes range from 4-inch to 10-inch. The smaller pots will have a single “pinched” or “straightup” plant, while the larger will have up to four pinched or nine tall straightup plants. The style and size is a matter of consumer preference, as price becomes a factor.

How do we price? Not as high as we should, because of geographic region and competition. We feel we provide a good fair value. This



emphasis on value holds true throughout the year in both our plants and the giftware that makes up a significant part of our business.

Like you, we have been overwhelmed with the many introductions within the last few years. We constantly evaluate with a discriminating eye and established criteria, which fits our growing areas and our retail need. To this date, marketing has not driven our needs, but rather the quality of the plant, whether we properly use the week cycles to our advantage – be it early-, mid-, or late-season and color of the foliage. It is not a secret that the dark leaf varieties outsell

all our other varieties.

Knowing this, we make sure the vast majority of our crop is of the dark leaf types. Along with the dark leaf as a criterion, we strongly look at an entire family to assure the similarity of plant habit and growing characteristics.

Poinsettias are enjoyable to grow, beautiful to view in mass color, and exquisite to observe in a warm vibrant home or office setting. This plant has earned the number one position in the potted plant market and should remain as a seasonal plant. Extending its use would set aside another tradition in this country – let us enjoy it at Christmas. **OFA**

NEW AND POPULAR NOVELTY VARIETIES FROM FISCHER

Harvey Lang

Fischer USA Inc.

2995 Wilderness Place, Suite 102

Boulder, CO 80301

303-415-1466

Fax: 303-415-1605

‘Sonora White Glitter’ (Figure 1, page 12) is a new and exciting 2001 bicolor variety in the Fischer Sonora series. White Glitter has a 9.5- to 10-week flowering response, and depending on temperature, will finish the end of November into early December. It is easy to grow, has very good branching, and can be grown in a range of container sizes. Like other “jingle” varieties, growers should expect some variability in color and speckling. Fischer recommends finishing the plant under relatively cool temperatures or applying a late Bonzi drench for more upright bracts and better presentation. Consumers will be excited with the plant’s superb “jingle” color, with distinct white splashes against dark red bracts. It’s an ideal variety for retailers looking for a colorful bicolor during the early December season.

‘Lemon Snow’ (Figure 2, page 12) is an attractive novelty variety for the early poinsettia season. It has distinct creamy yellow bracts above dark green leaves. It has a compact to medium growth habit and can be grown in both 4-inch and 6-inch pots. Growers who finish the plant cool will be pleased with the exceptional yellow color. It has very good shelf life and makes a great holiday plant for consumers looking for a softer “designer” look. The plant also works well in combination containers with foliage plants and other green-leaved material.

‘Silverstar Marble’ (Figure 3, page 12) is Fischer’s newest creation in the Silverstar line. Its beautiful pink and white bicolor bracts sit above soft green, variegated foliage. ‘Silverstar Marble’ has excellent branching, a uniform, compact growth habit, and flowers around the end of November (response time is nine weeks). It has been a favorite with consumers across the United States at various trade shows and exhibitions.

‘Cortez Burgundy’ (Figure 4, page 12) is a brand new Fischer variety that will be available to growers this season in small, trial quantities. It has eye-catching burgundy bracts with

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NEW AND POPULAR NOVELTY VARIETIES FROM FISCHER

Continued from page 11

distinct yellow cyathia. As with other Cortez varieties, the growth habit is well-rounded, with a smooth flat-topped appearance. For compact growth and very even branching, growers can spray Florel at 500 ppm five days before and five days after pinching. For the deepest burgundy color, growers should

finish this variety on the cool side. Fischer believes 'Cortez Burgundy' will be a real winner in the novelty market. Retailers will be amazed at the response of consumers when they see this unique and attractive variety.

'Da Vinci' (Figure 5) is another new variety available to growers in limited quantities for the upcoming holiday season. It's an early flowering novelty type (response time is eight weeks) that will be ready to market during the week of Thanksgiving. Its dark green leaves make a nice contrast with the outstanding strawberry-peach bracts. The plant is compact and is easy to maintain both in propagation and at the finish-



Figure 1. Sonora White Glitter.



Figure 2. Lemon Snow.



Figure 3. Silverstar Marble.



Figure 4. Cortez Burgundy.



Figure 5. Da Vinci.



Figure 6. Carousel.

ing stage. It should be a hit with florists and retailers who are looking for something a little different and novel for the early poinsettia season.

'Carousel' (Figure 6) is a bright red, late flowering variety with interesting curled bracts. The look gives the appearance of motion – like a carousel. Although it has been on the market for a couple of years, it is gaining in popularity and is

always a favorite at trade shows and consumer surveys. 'Carousel' flowers naturally around December 7, however, growers can black cloth the plant to force it into flower earlier in the season. Fischer recommends finishing the plant under warm temperatures and with eight to ten bracts. For best presentation and attractiveness, the plant should be marketed in full bloom with good flower and bract development. **OFA**

Poinsettias: Ideas on Marketing and Forms

Jack Williams
Paul Ecke Ranch
P.O. Box 230488
Encinitas, CA 92023-0488
760-944-4060
Fax: 760-944-4002
jwilliams@eckeranch.com

It seems that every year we hear growers complain about the price of poinsettias and how it is harder than ever to make money with the crop. Despite all the interest and desire we hear about changing things in the future, it seems, for most growers, the cycle repeats itself. However, there are solutions to be had if growers will take it upon themselves to trial new ideas. If things are not working the way you want, then the quickest way to stimulate change is to do something about it. Then why is the cycle self-perpetuating? That is the question we must all answer when we look in the mirror and think about what we are doing in our own businesses.

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER:

1. When is the last time you visited your customers to assess what they need for their market? You are certainly aware of what you sell to them, but are you aware of what they sell? You may be surprised at the product sizes,

colors, and forms they use that are available from your competition. But more importantly, you may discover your customer wants something that is not available anywhere else. That unmet need is an opportunity for you!

2. Do not expect that your customers – whether they are consumers or retailers – are aware of the latest colors or novelty poinsettias available. The majority of information on new products goes to growers, not retailers or consumers. So why wait for them to ask for it? Put yourself in the position of bringing the latest introductions to them first. It is exceptional products like Winter Rose™ that create enough attention to drive sales from the consumer market. Get out and show your customers what's new and work out what they should add to their orders. While you're at it, why not have some discussion about the opportunity to charge more for these premium plants!

3. Finally, try doing some different products each year and determine which have the highest interest and value level for your customers. When something works for them, repeat it the next season. When something does not work, modify

the features that were not desirable until you come up with the right product.

Part of the solution is simple: don't grow the "same old things!" Every year we hear from growers that plants that are bigger or smaller than the 6-inch pinched plant sell because they are not as readily available or viewed as a commodity item. Even though a grower cannot get as many large pots in the greenhouse, it is important to evaluate if they provide a greater per foot return than 6-inch pinched. Fewer plants may still mean better profits. Do the math, then decide what works.

Another angle is to grow something different than "just red." Novelties are hot! So why should you use them if your customer is not asking for them? Does your customer even know they exist? The most likely answer is "no." Red is the safe choice for most retailers, while consumers are interested in what is new, different, and unique. They are most likely to use these novelty colors in a form different than what they purchase for general display or gifts. Avoid putting these new cultivars in the same size and form as the rest of your crop. A few may be fine, but if you are going to incorporate them

into production, be sure that you highlight the features of each cultivar to its maximum advantage. One example is the "variegated foliage" cultivars like 'Heirloom' or 'Holly Point'. If presented as a 6-inch pinched plant, consumers are not likely to notice the attractive, two-toned leaves because bracts will cover-up the leaves on top and pot covers or other packaging may cover-up leaves on the lower part of the plant. However, when grown in a taller form that shows off the unique foliage characteristics, the results will have a higher impact. Look at the great novelty poinsettia colors and forms available today and the opportunity they generate is obvious.

Consider unique product forms that offer opportunities for you and your customers instead of all pinched product.

- Before free-branching poinsettia cultivars were developed, non-pinched poinsettias were grown for the market. By using multiple plants in a pot without the standard pinching, the finished product created has exceptionally large bracts (more show), strong stems (less branch breakage), and greater value. Is this a product for the mass market?

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POINSETTIAS: IDEAS ON MARKETING AND FORMS

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Probably not, but it is a product for independent retailers, florists, and the fundraiser market. Although three blooms (three plants per pot) have been produced by growers, look to today's market needs for additional ideas.

- Miniature poinsettias are a fantastic addition to a blooming program and offer retailers something they can offer for impulse sales at an attractive price. Yes, those price points are important, so small products have a real advantage in this competitive market. At production densities of about six per square foot and a very short production time frame (start in September), this is a product form to consider. Any form of sub-irrigation is ideal for growing miniatures. Plants can be enhanced at point of shipping through addition of self-watering containers, similar to what is used commonly with crops like African violets. These handy containers make it possible to maintain the finished plants in excellent condition with minimal effort. They are ideal for use in small spaces (hospitals, restaurants, etc.) or as gifts from young children to their friends or teachers.

- Plants grown in short containers such as bulb pans make ideal tabletop displays and create long lasting, living centerpieces. This form is especially popular with florists who are busy throughout the holidays and who look for solutions to table arrangements or decorations with minimal time and effort. At the Paul Ecke Ranch, we use four plants in a 6-inch bulb pan, which finishes between 9- and 12-inch. These plants do not take much more space than good quality 6 1/2-inch pots would (1.4 square feet per plant), can be grown in less time, and offer our florists something different to use in their line.

- Another miniature idea is the miniature poinsettia tree. Instead of taking the time and space to grow trees that are anywhere from four to five (or more) feet in height, try growing trees that are no taller than 18-inches. This shorter size takes less time and space to produce than traditional trees yet sells for a higher price than forms that take up comparable production space. Likewise, they do not take up as much space in the florist shop and fit well into even smaller living spaces of

apartments. Using poinsettias with smaller leaves and bracts helps keep the look of the finished product proportional to its size. Some of the best cultivars to consider include the Pepride series, 'Cranberry Punch' (Figure 1), and the Winter Rose series. All make outstanding miniature trees that are attractive, long lasting, and easy to grow and sell. For this form, don't overlook the container used. Here is the place to spend more on a nicer pot with details to project the look of elegance appropriate for the specialty topiary market.

Beyond the concept of differentiation through cultivar selection or product, consider packaging and merchandising poinsettias for additional sales.

- Combination planters are very popular in the spring and summer annual market, so why not in the holiday pot plant market? Try creating attractive indoor planters using a variety of houseplants and other flowering pot plants to compliment the poinsettias and holiday decorating schemes. This is not just another "basket or dish garden." Make it a gift item that goes beyond just plants. Do you work with a retailer that sells gifts and collectibles? Why not develop a Department 56® gift that features a special piece

displayed as part of the container with poinsettias? Or what about Christopher Radko® or other specialty ornaments hanging in a poinsettia tree? Garden centers that feature these products make money with these items; why not do something creative that ties the two product lines together?

- Packaging and visual merchandising should be considered options for helping support higher price points and promote the poinsettia at retail. We have not seen much done with packaging here in North America, yet, but this is probably going to change soon. We have seen products like the Winter Rose poinsettia sold in Europe using special boxing and promotional tools which has allowed these plants to be sold at nearly double the price of other poinsettias at retail (Figure 2). The good news is that growers made more money on the product, too!

These are a few ideas for growers to consider. For growing information on some of the product forms or novelty cultivars listed above, visit www.ecke.com. Although there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution, growers will need to be ready to do some trial and error in their own market before discounting any ideas or any more plants!



Figure 1. Cranberry Punch miniature trees.

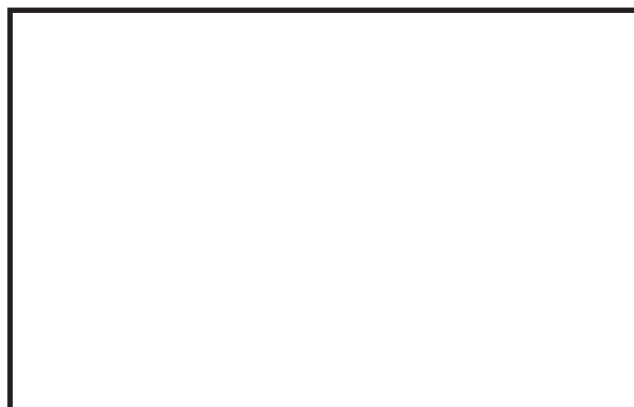
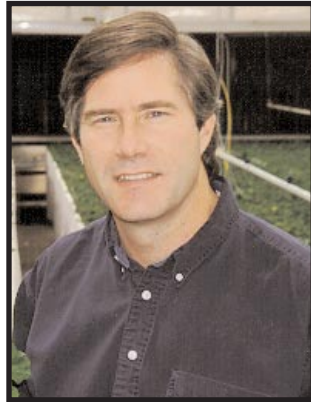


Figure 2. European packaging can sometimes double the price of poinsettias at retail.

OFA

WHAT CAN I GROW FOR CHRISTMAS?

Karl Batschke
Oglevee Ltd.
 700 Vanderbilt Road
 Connellsville, PA 15425
 724-626-2122
 Fax: 724-626-1099
 karl@oglevee.com



While poinsettias may be the 800-pound gorilla of Christmas crops, there are some beautiful alternatives to consider. Historically, Hiemalis begonia, kalanchoe, zygo cactus, cyclamen, and even chrysanthemums have played an important role.

Today, these novelty crops can still be found in mixed baskets along with poinsettias. Additionally, cyclamen, kalanchoe, and Hiemalis begonia are very long lasting in indoor plantscaping or sub-tropical landscaping.

HIEMALIS BEGONIA

I can remember a time when red Elatior begonias were called "Christmas Begonias." Fortunately, growers no longer have to deal with the mildew-prone varieties of the past. New red or white cultivars such as 'Hilda', 'Barkos', or 'Hope' are easy to grow, mildew resistant, and free flowering.

For use in mixed containers, 4-inch pots should be started from rooted liners 8 to 10 weeks prior to sale. Pinching will add two weeks or more to production time. 6-inch containers can be grown from one or two pinched liners and will require 10 to 14 weeks of crop time. Alternatively, three non-pinched liners can be used in a 6 1/2-inch pot for a 9- to 10-week finish.

Hiemalis begonia grow best in a well-drained mix that is high in quality peat moss. Start with EC of <0.8 (2:1 extract) to keep from damaging their tender root system. Media pH should be maintained between 5.5 and 6.0 for best results. Once established, a balanced feed program of 200 to 250 ppm N and K, and 100 to 200 ppm P will provide a good starting point. Let your soil and tissue analysis guide you from there.

Temperature and light play a critical role in producing quality Hiemalis begonias. This is a warm temperature crop. Night temperatures should not go below 66°F. and day temperatures should range from 75°F to 78°F. While begonias will burn under high light conditions, moderate light levels, particularly in the north, will produce full, healthy plants. Start out between 2,000 and 2,500 footcandles, raising light levels as high as 4,000 footcandles once days are short and air temperatures are cooler. Generally, little or no shade is required on this crop in November and December.

Because Hiemalis begonia is a short day crop, night break lighting should be applied for the first few weeks to encourage vegetative growth. For 4-inch plants potted after September 1, one to two weeks of long days will get them off to a good start. Days are naturally short enough after this that black

clothing is not required. For pinched plants or larger containers, light until new breaks are visible.

The primary insect pests of Hiemalis begonia are aphid and thrips. Orthene or Endeavor are effective for aphid control, Conserve for thrip. Be sure to monitor insect populations to keep them in check prior to flowering; most sprays will cause some injury to begonia flowers.

Powdery mildew is the primary disease threat to this crop. Bayleton (Strike) is an effective, long-lasting chemical control. Also, keep the foliage dry by using drip irrigation or watering early in the day. Be careful to avoid rapid temperature fluctuations in the begonia houses, as this also contributes to powdery mildew development. As a general rule, healthy, actively-growing plants are more resistant to this disease. Keep your begonia plant free of root zone stress from high salts and over- or under-watering.

KALANCHOE

Another historically popular Christmas crop is kalanchoe. This short-day requiring plant fits into the niche mixed container market very well. As a sub-tropical landscape plant, it has the added potential of providing an early spring re-blooming period.

Christmas flowering of kalanchoe would require planting September 10 for 4-inch pots and one week earlier for 6-inch. The Forever series of kalanchoe are very free branching and require no pinching or growth regulators. Provide three weeks of long days for 6-inch pots and two weeks for 4-inch. Night break lighting between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. will eliminate premature budding. Short day treatment should begin by providing a minimum of 14 hours of continuous darkness from the end of long day treatment, until October 1. Days are naturally short enough after this period.

Rooted liners should be planted into a well-drained mix. Adjust pH to 5.8 to 6.2 and initial EC of 1.0 ms (2:1 extract.) A balanced liquid feeding program of 200 ppm N and K and 100 ppm of P will provide a solid basis until your soil and tissue analysis suggest other needs.

Kalanchoe prefer night temperatures of 64°F to 66°F, and day temperatures of 75°F.

The primary insect pests of kalanchoe are aphid, spider mite, and thrips. Monitor your crop on a weekly basis and spray as needed. Kalanchoe are sensitive to oils and some of the carriers used in emulsifiable concentrate (EC) pesticides. Use water soluble powders (WSP), wettable powders (WP), flowables (F), or water disbursed granular (WDG) type products. Orthene, Thidan, Endeavor, and Avid have been effective controls.

CYCLAMEN

This popular winter crop has, until recently, been the most popular Christmas plant in Europe. It flowers for as long as four months, with striking colors and beautifully zoned leaves. Because of these attributes, it is wonderful for both interior and temperate exterior use. Advancements in breeding have reduced crop times to about the same as poinsettias when starting from a good sized liner.

Probably one of the biggest advantages of growing cyclamen today is their energy efficiency. Cyclamen do best when grown in a cool environment. Night temperatures of 55°F and days of 68°F are ideal. Although these cooler temperatures may extend crop time a bit, they will produce large and abun-

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WHAT CAN I GROW FOR CHRISTMAS?

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dant flowers and dense, compact plants. Light levels also contribute to healthy, high-quality plants. As outside temperatures drop below 75°F, cyclamen are able to tolerate light levels up to 5,000 footcandles. In the summer and early fall, shade to 3,500 footcandles to protect young foliage.

Cyclamen produce a tuber or corm that generates both leaves and flowers. Because of this, they prefer well-drained soil, high in organic matter. Media pH of 5.8 to 6.2 with a low to moderate EC of 1.0 to 1.2 ms will provide a good nutritional availability. Cyclamen prefer slightly more potassium than nitrogen, so a 2-1-3 ratio seems to work well. When transplanting, be sure to leave the top 1/3 to 1/2 of the corm exposed. Cyclamen are susceptible to several crown rots when planted too deeply. Planting too shallow, however, will create a plant that is "floppy" at the soil line and is also undesirable.

Fusarium and *Erwinia* crown rots are two of the most common disease problems with this crop. Good sanitation practices, purchasing liners from a reputable supplier, and avoiding excess moisture or high salt stress will reduce the incidence of these diseases. There is anecdotal evidence that composted bark soils help suppress *Fusarium* in this crop, and they are worth a try.

Western flower thrip love to feed on the flowers and pollen of cyclamen, leaving a dusty trail on the leaf canopy as indication of their activity. Thrip control should be done early in the crop, prior to flowering because the downward facing nature of cyclamen flowers makes spray coverage nearly impossible. Cyclamen are also susceptible to their namesake, cyclamen mite. This tiny mite infests the corm and causes distortion in foliage and flowers, ultimately making plants unsaleable. Preventative sprays of Avid or Thiodan are helpful.

ZYGOCACTUS

Zygocactus, or holiday cactus, is a specialty crop that has

enjoyed great popularity in recent years. New cultivars have increased the reliability and color range as well.

This crop is in the succulent class and must be grown in a well-drained media. (Adjust pH to 6.0 or higher.) This crop is very sensitive to iron toxicity, so regular soil tests are necessary to monitor pH. Balanced fertilizer applied at 150 to 200 ppm in a ratio of 2-1-3, with an emphasis on magnesium at 50 ppm will keep the plants growing actively. Monitor EC and maintain salts between 0.8 and 1.2 ms.

Growing temperatures are best maintained in the range of 62°F to 65°F night temperature, and 72°F to 75°F days. Light levels should be maintained below 3,500 footcandles until October, or when solar intensity decreases. They may be finished in full greenhouse sun in the North, and light shade in the South.

Flowering is triggered by either temperatures below 58°F or short days. Because this is a short day crop, it can be scheduled for flowering on a year-round basis. Short days will typically begin sometime in mid-September. Plants grown on a natural schedule will flower near Thanksgiving. In order to increase bud count and uniformity, a technique called "leveling" is used. During the first week of short days, the top one or two pads are removed on each shoot. The remaining pads are of uniform maturity and will send several buds, rather than the typical one or even none from new, immature shoots.

The primary disease problems with holiday cactus are root related. *Pythium* and *Phytophthora*, as well as *Fusarium* are best managed through sanitation.

Fungus gnat larvae can cause devastating damage to the roots and stems of this crop. Manage water to minimize algae growth, and use preventative controls such as Adept or Precision. Western flower thrip are an additional problem during the flowering period. Control them early in the crop with Conserve.

Although the poinsettia may be the king of Christmas flowers, there are opportunities for growers to diversify their mix into these and other specialty crops.

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