

Mum is (Not) the Word

CAN A NEW BRAND HELP INVIGORATE AN OLD FAVORITE AND SPARK CONSUMER INTEREST?

By Liz Hunt

All around us, the world is changing. From fashion to hair color and gardens to gifts, excitement and vitality is on everyone's wish list. When Syngenta Flowers Inc. started planning for the next big thing in potted flowers, we thought revitalizing an old favorite would be a great way to go. After three years of development, Syngenta Flowers is unveiling a new strategy for one specific plant segment and mum is definitely NOT the word.

Growers, retailers and consumers are always looking for something fresh and different. When it comes to potted chrysanthemums however, "fresh and different" isn't how they have recently been thought of in the marketplace. This year however, Syngenta Flowers is unveiling the Zenia program, a new and vibrant branded program that is aiming to reinvigorate the pot mum market. The Zenia collection pays tribute to the Asian descent of chrysanthemums and was developed, according to breeder Wendy Bergman, because the flowers have been revered for centuries as symbols of beauty.

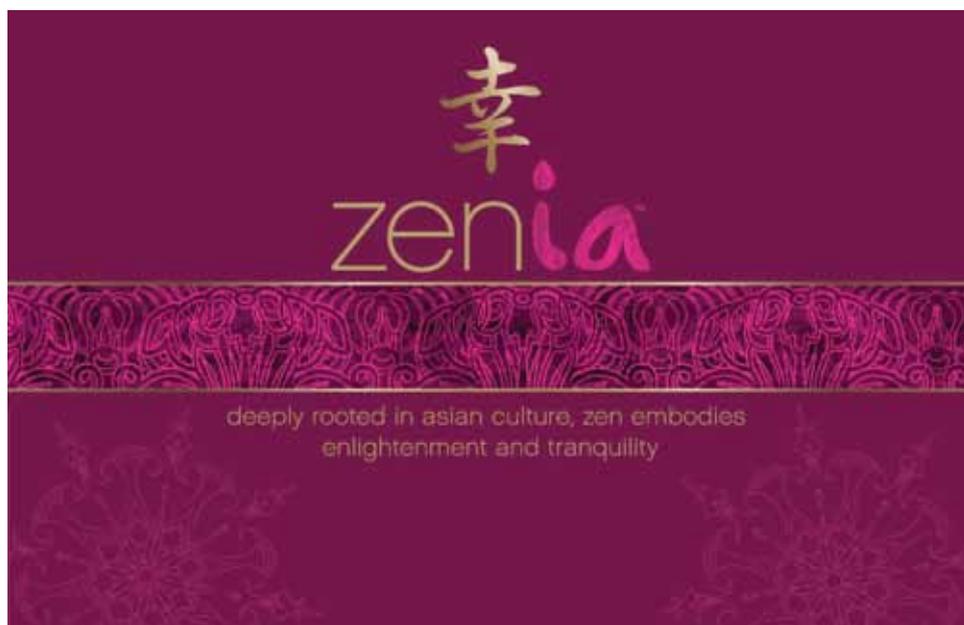
"Going way back, pot mums became very popular because they were easy to produce, gave a lot of color, and lasted a long time," explains Bergman.

The price for mums hasn't changed much over the past 30 years. So when plants like mums begin to lose their value, the question becomes, "How do we take a commodity product and make it a specialty product?"

"With the chrysanthemum breeding, there are so many combinations of colors and shapes we can put together," Bergman says. "Anything from a 6-foot cut flower to a 6-inch fleurette is possible. We've been able to breed the Zenia to be so unique



'Lemon Springs', 'Purple Springs' and 'Red Springs'



When designing Zenia plants tags and promotional material, Asian and zen-like elements were used as inspiration.

and different that a lot of consumers don't even recognize them as a mum."

So different, in fact, that Bergman categorizes Zenia as a "novelty-type" plant series that will maintain high standards and originality. With six distinct varieties currently available, 'Green Valley', 'Encino', 'Red Springs', 'Lemon Springs', 'Rose Springs' and 'Purple Springs', the Zenia program will likely be kept to a very exclusive group of selections that truly embodies the uniqueness of these flowers.

"Mums are more than the decorative or daisy flower forms," Bergman says. "So for the Zenia program, we selected cultivars that are different than what consumers see as a mum. We have included anemone and spoon forms, as well as a variety of color patterns."

Bred to Be Bold

When developing a program such as Zenia, breeders have to balance creativity and consumer

interest with practicality and grower needs. Consideration must be given to the ease with which a grower can fit them into their current production schedule, so Syngenta aimed for an efficient breeding cycle and easy finish production techniques.

Given the global appreciation for the chrysanthemum flower type, Syngenta has worked with international colleagues to assess their mum programs and Bergman, especially, seeks input from

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'Encino'

around the globe.

"I have trials in a lot of different places, like Brazil, Europe, Canada, California and Florida," explains Bergman. "I work with people throughout Syngenta to see what is interesting and possible. We walk through my trials and talk about what's exciting and what we want to work on more. Sometimes they see something they like but say the flower is too small. So I'll work to get a bigger flower. I take direction from a lot of different places. Wherever I go, I talk to people about what they find interesting."

What's in a Name?

Not to be lost in the appeal of the flowers themselves, the Zenia name is one-of-a-kind as well.

"Before we had a name, our term for the breeding goal was the 'Not a Mum' program," Bergman quips. "But some consumer insight really helped us kick start what it is today."

When Syngenta showed pictures of the selected varieties to a few consumers, they couldn't place the type of flower they were. Despite being familiar with plants, including daisies and even mums, they were unable to identify the Zenia as chrysanthemums. One participant anecdotally exclaimed, "Oh, wow! These really have a zen feel to them." And that's how the Zenia name was born.

Branded for Sale

It's not only the colors, the shapes and the name make these flowers special. To highlight the distinctiveness of the program, Syngenta worked with John Henry Co. to develop eye-catching point-of-purchase (POP) materials to showcase the program beyond a typical care tag.

"Most tags simply name the plant, show a photo and include the copy about how you plant it and take care of it," says Jeff Fillion, creative

director at John Henry Co. “The tags we created for the Syngenta Zenia program really speak to the entire Zenia brand.”

In keeping with the Asian theme, Fillion and his team used colors that consumers normally relate to a “spa-like” Zen feeling, using aquas and blues, which he initially loved. But after thinking more about it, he realized they were going down the wrong path.

“I started thinking about the colors of the flowers and, to me, they had a more Zen-exotic feel,” Fillion says. “So, I emailed the artist and said we needed to regroup, and when we did, we moved away from the Zen-spa colors and went with Zen-exotic, incorporating spicy colors like burgundy and gold.”

Another interesting aspect of these materials is the use of the Chinese character for “happy and enjoy a long life.” It is fitting for the plants it adorns, which Syngenta hopes will bring happiness to consumers at home for several weeks.

“I think growers and retailers are always interested in something new and different,” Fillion adds. “The Zenia program was introduced by Syngenta at the California Spring Trials and it received a lot of interest right from the start. I think it’s because the packaging is quite unique for what used to be a very ordinary plant.”

Crafted for the Consumer

“The shelf life on these varieties is much improved for consumers so they will get a lasting product that looks good in their home or office for a long time,” Bergman says. “That, combined with the pot cover and tag, really delivers the whole Zen message.”

The new message of longevity and happiness is something that wouldn’t have resonated in the past with your typical pot mum buyer. Many consumers think of the plant as grandmother’s plant — something that’s old-fashioned.

“One of our customers in Denmark said, ‘Every time an old lady dies, they lose a pot mum customer,’” recalls Bergman. “And, you know, that’s probably really true!”

“So, it is time to appeal to a younger generation of consumers so we don’t have that attrition. Our hope is that we can help this generation recognize the value of these plants so growers can get a better price for them and consumers can get something more interesting.

We want these plants to have lasting quality for the consumer,” Bergman says.

Syngenta hopes that throughout the life of the new Zenia program, growers will find it easy to adopt and consumers will find new value in these unique plants. With a shelf-life four times that of cut flower arrangements, we are sure a Zenia can

create happiness and long enjoyment for all who experience the brand. 

Liz Hunt is senior market manager for Syngenta Flowers Inc. For more information, call 800.549.0158 or visit www.syngentaflowersinc.com.



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