



The Consumers' Response to New Poinsettia Cultivars

HOW DID CONSUMERS RANK THE 2012 POINSETTIA INTRODUCTIONS?

By Jim Barrett and John Dole

Each year the poinsettia breeder companies introduce many new cultivars — see the February issue of *GPN* for information on the 21 new cultivars from the North American Poinsettia Trials being introduced for 2012.

As a part of these trials, we ask consumers to give us their opinions on the new cultivars, which is useful in gauging how the introductions might perform in the marketplace compared to established cultivars. Currently, in mass-market garden centers, there is a shift toward a greater percentage of reds. However for independent garden centers, novelties are still relatively important and can be used to differentiate themselves from mass markets. The consumer evaluations are particularly helpful to learn which novelties have the strongest appeal.

The consumer surveys were conducted differently at each of the trial locations. At Homewood Nursery in Raleigh, N.C., 35 poinsettia cultivars were selected from the National Trials and displayed in their retail greenhouse from Nov. 19 to Dec. 9, 2011. Customers were asked to select their five favorites without ranking them. Names of the cultivars were not posted and the plants were displayed as one group — not separated by color or type.

At North Carolina State University (NCSU) plants were displayed with names in five categories during the Poinsettia Open House, which takes place indoors under fluorescent lighting (see Table 2). Participants were asked to select their three favorite plants from each of the groups and their overall favorites. At NCSU, several combination containers with different cultivars were also evaluated.

At the University of Florida (UF), the survey was conducted in the greenhouse as a part of the Poinsettia Show and Sale on Dec. 8 and 9, 2011. Specific comparisons were set up (Tables 3 through 7) with four to 10 plants in each group and participants selected their one or three favorites for each group. The majority of participants at each location were women and the number of completed surveys were 532, 189, and 788 at Homewood, NCSU and UF, respectively.

Participants in these surveys are consumers typically interested in new, novel and higher-end plants. Notice that in the Top 10 selections at both Homewood and NCSU (Table 1) the top five cultivars were all either novelties or a non-red color. The preferences shown in these surveys are indicative of customers in less price sensitive markets.

'Ice Punch' was the clear outstanding cultivar at

Table 1. Top 10 overall favorites selected at Homewood and NCSU

Rank	Homewood Nursery	North Carolina State Univ.
1	Ice Punch	Ice Punch
2	Premium Ice Crystal	Hollystar Red
3	Red Glitter	Polly's Pink
4	Premium Picasso	Premium Picasso
5	Polar Bear	Early Monet
6	Christmas Beauty** Dummen 0701**	Dramatic Red
7		Noel
8	Marbella	Jubilee Red** Premium Polar** Red Glitter**
9	Premium Marble	
10	Bella Italia** Cortez Burgundy**	

**Ties

Table 2. NCSU favorites by color

Red	Rank
Dramatic Red** Jubilee Red**	1
Noel	3
Premium Red	4
Freedom Early Red	5
Pink	
Polly's Pink	1
Jubilee Pink	2
Christmas Feelings Pink	3
White	
Whitestar	1
Premium Polar	2
Christmas Feelings White New	3
Novelty	
Ice Punch	1
Premium Picasso	2
Cortez Burgundy** Sparkling Punch**	3
Combination Pots	
Ice Punch and Sparkling Punch	1
Christmas Season and Wintersun	2
Winter Rose Red and White	3

**Ties

Table 3. Red at UF — consumers picked favorite three plants from these cultivars.

Cultivar	% selecting the cultivar
Orion Red	20
Ecke 1230	18
Premium Red	16
Jubilee	11
Advent Red	9
Christmas Beauty	7
Mars Red	6
Early Glory Red	5
Pandorra Red	4
Prestige Red	4

Table 5. Important novelties at UF — consumers picked their favorite plant from these cultivars.

Cultivar	% selecting the cultivar
Ice Punch	46
Premium Ice Crystal	21
Ruby Frost	15
Monet Twilight	12
Sparkling Punch	6

Table 4. Novelty at UF — consumers picked favorite three plants from these cultivars.

Cultivar	% selecting the cultivar
Ice Punch	19
Sonora White Glitter Early	15
Ruby Frost	15
Winter Rose Dark Red	12
Tapestry	11
Premium Ice Crystal	10
Premium Picasso	6
Strawberries N Cream	5
Saturnus Twist	4
Marco Polo	3

Table 6. Monet and Picasso types at UF — consumers picked their favorite plant from these cultivars.

Cultivar	% selecting the cultivar
Premium Picasso (darker colored plant)	70
Monet Twilight	19
Premium Picasso (lighter colored plant)	6
Early Monet	5

Table 7. Shades of red at UF — consumers picked their favorite plant from these cultivars. These cultivars were selected to represent either darker (bluish) red vs. brighter (scarlet) red bract colors. White cultivars were placed between these plants to make the differences in bract color clearer.

Cultivar	% selecting the cultivar
Bright red, large bracts (Premier Red)	52
Bright red, small bracts (Syngenta 26450)	21
Dark red, large bracts (Early Prestige)	15
Dark red, small bracts (Pandora Red)	12

all three locations. It has been the leading cultivar in the surveys for three to four years and these results indicate that consumer interest in 'Ice Punch' remains very strong. 'Sparkling Punch' is new for 2012 and has light pink and white bracts. 'Premium Ice Crystal' has become an important commercial novelty cultivar and often receives high ratings in the consumer surveys. Consumers showed stronger interest in 'Ice Punch' compared to the other novelties (Tables 4 and 5), which is similar to results for a comparable test in 2010. Also, these results and those at NCSU (Table 2) indicate that consumer demand for 'Sparkling Punch' may not be as strong as for 'Ice Punch', which is not surprising considering consumer preferences for novelties with some red coloration. 'Premium Picasso' (Table 1) was among the

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top cultivars at Homewood and NCSU. It is frequently compared to 'Monet Twilight', often a favorite in past surveys. 'Monet Early' is a new cultivar with a similar color pattern. Table 6 shows results for a UF comparison of these cultivars. Cultivars with this color pattern often have considerable variation between plants with different amounts of red. The consumers showed a clear preference for the darker Picasso selection.

NCSU has been doing combination containers with mixed colors, and the consumers' favorites for this year are listed in Table 2. While two of the combinations are red and white, mixing 'Ice Punch' and 'Sparkling Punch' is an example of creating a very novel look. Just as with spring crops, poinsettia combinations can be used to create novelty that is not achieved with a single cultivar. For UF's Poinsettia Show and Sale, students grow a large array of different cultivars in 4-inch pots and combine them in 12-inch terra cotta bowls to create unique, one-of-a-kind containers. They make 120 to 130 units, priced at \$40, which generates about 10 percent of their total sales.

For white cultivars, 'Whitestar', 'Premium Polar' and 'Polar Bear' have been among the highest ranked cultivars for the past couple of years. 'Polly's Pink' has been the strongest pink cultivar in the trials, recently. Among marbles there has not been a clear leader the past few years, possibly due to the fact that 'Marblestar', still highly popular, has not been in the trials in several years. For jingle bell and glitter types, the strongest cultivars the past two years have been 'Sonora White Glitter' and 'Red Glitter'.

Red is the primary color in all market levels. While consumers can pick a favorite red when asked, they generally like most of the plants. Thus, it is common to see results as shown in Table 3 where not a single cultivar received over 20 percent of the votes. At UF, four plants with different bract sizes and shade of red were compared (Table 7) and over 50 percent of consumers picked the plant with large, bright red bracts. The preference for large bracts is not a surprise. In North America,

production for the past 20+ years has been dominated by the dark, bluish red of Freedom and Prestige. We are beginning to see more cultivars with lighter or brighter shades of red and it will be interesting to see if there will be a shift in production towards those shades. 

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