



Two from the Show

The Ohio Short Course trade show never fails to impress with its vast displays of new plants from all over the world. This year, two gems in particular have made it to these pages: Lachenalia and Scutellaria.

By Rick Schoellhorn, University of Florida

This year's Ohio Florists' Association trade show was, as usual, a mind-boggling mix of new crops and production technology. The educational program was stuffed with great speakers, and I admire anyone who can attend this event, walk the show and attend the educational programs without being reduced to a twitching mass of over-stimulated nerve endings. This is a great show to see almost everything in our industry on display. However, after seeing so many booths it really takes something different to catch my eye and make me stop to really study what is being displayed.

This year there were a couple of booths with something really different and off the map in terms of crops. Okay, I'll admit it — these are two crops we are working on in Florida, and I found out someone had already beaten us to the punch! This is great news, because these wonderful plants — Lachenalia and Scutellaria — hold excellent potential to become high-profit specialty items that are not difficult to master.

LACHENALIA: A HYACINTH FOR WARM SEASONS

Vosbol international's booth at Ohio show was full of only one crop: a little-known and completely underused flowering bulb. I had heard of Lachenalia for years, but this was the first time I had actually seen it in flower and available for commercial production, and I think it offers a great market niche for U.S. growers.

Lachenalia are from the cool regions of South Africa and resemble the Dutch hyacinth in flower shape and form, but are quite different and really striking. If you are looking for a flowering bulb that your customers will never have seen before that is both exotic and extremely colorful, this crop might just be for you.

Unlike the typical spring bulbs we force every year, this crop does not need the long cooling periods of the Dutch hyacinth. In fact, with proper scheduling this bulb can be produced right through summer as long as the nights remain cool in your production facility. If you have been avoiding bulb production because of the equipment needed to do it right, you might consider this crop, which can be grown on benchtops from planting to sale.

The flowers, resembling the better-known Dutch hybrid hyacinth, are not as stiff or solid in texture, and the individual flowers hang slightly downward and do not flare like the Dutch types. These are not as fragrant as Dutch hyacinth either, so don't expect that strong perfume when the plants flower. Cultivars come in jeweled tones of yellow, orange, red and a bright purple to blue. The foliage is spotted or striped with purple tones, and the whole effect is very exotic. Plants range in size from 6-12 inches and leaves are from 6-10 inches in length.

The 'African Beauty' series, from Vosbol, currently has eight colors. The most vigorous are the yellow and gold-toned flowers, but look for those that have purple markings and purple-toned buds, as they are more striking on the shelf or bench. Yellow-flowering forms include 'Fransie', 'Namakwa', 'Ronina' and 'Romaud'. Golden-toned hybrids like 'Rolina' and 'Romelia' have buds in

purple to red tones that open gold. Red-flowered 'Robijn' is very striking, but the show-stopper is the blue-purple-toned 'Rupert' (although this cultivar is also not quite as strong as the yellow cultivars).

For frost-free regions, these bulbs can also be grown outdoors and perform beautifully in sunny, protected locations. They will eventually settle into a winter flowering pattern, although flowering will always be a little difficult to predict. They are still a definite option for specialty landscape use as well. ♦

Culture Quickie: *Lachenalia*

Fertilization. One hundred fifty ppm liquid feed, or low level of slow-release are adequate for production. Remember this is a bulb, and much of the growth is based on the quality of the bulb, but monitor the crop and media pH until you develop an understanding of the crop. A preventative, broad-spectrum fungicide 1-2 weeks after planting is also a good idea.

Watering. Keep moist but not soggy wet. Media moisture can be used to control height in bright production situations.

Media. As with most bulbs, this crop needs good drainage and good nutrition. A well-drained mix with a little bit of clay will work well. Media pH should be between 5.2-6.0, so a bit on the acid side of the scale.

Production Temperatures. Day temperatures 65-80° F, night temperatures 50-55° F. It is important to have cool nights for best floral development. Flower color is also more intense with cool nights.

Light levels. Three thousand to 4,000 foot candles. Although the crop can be grown under lower light, it has tendency to stretch in low-light conditions. If you are growing under low-light conditions, try using media drench applications of growth regulators to control stem elongation.

Propagation. For commercial production, bulbs are shipped in from Europe in the spring. Lachenalia is also grown from seed by collectors, but it takes from 2-5 years to get a flowering-size bulb.

Crop timing. Five-inch pot with three bulbs takes 10-12 weeks from planting to sale; larger pot sizes require more bulbs but timing remains pretty much the same. In 8- to 10-inch containers, use bulb pans rather than standard pots. Other recommended pot sizes are 2- to 3-inch pot with one bulb per, or five bulbs in a 6- to 7-inch pot.

Flowering. There are some varieties that flower earlier and some later. This becomes less of an issue as the season progresses. Once in flower, the spikes last from 2-3 weeks. Varieties range from yellow-white to yellow, orange and red, and purple to blue tones. In the landscape, flowering becomes an annual event, usually when nights are cool and after foliage has developed for a season.

SCUTELLARIA: STILL WAITING FOR FAME

This group of plants is going to be a huge crop someday. They are much like snapdragons, but with much greater heat tolerance, an equal variety of colors and forms, and species produced by either seed or cuttings for the commercial market. Skull cap, the common

name for this group, is not exactly an encouraging title, but it has to do with the shape of the flower and nothing more threatening than that. This genus of plants is also growing in popularity as an herbal remedy for a variety of ailments. With the boost Echinacea got from herbal uses, there is potential for this group to come on strong.

There are a lot of different Scutellaria on the market, although you will have to look fairly hard to find them. They are available in specialty seed catalogs, from native plant suppliers, and very few have made it into the commercial market. Below is a short list of different skull caps you may want to try out in your nursery.



Seed-produced types. Look in specialty seed catalogs for *Scutellaria baicalensis* (pale blue to deep blue flowers) and *Scutellaria* 'Oriental Sun' (bright yellow spikes of half-inch flowers). Also, never underestimate your local wildflower or native plant suppliers for annual varieties that are best-suited to your area.

Vegetative types. The most common hybrids I have seen are 'Purple and Pink Fountains', two trailing forms with intense purple or fuchsia-pink blooms. They are great mixed container plants and also make good hanging basket plants. Another great skull cap is *Scutellaria formosana*, which has gray-green foliage with royal blue, 1-inch flowers on 3- to 6-inch spikes. It is evergreen in frost-free climates, and hardy to USDA Zone 6B.

Another vegetative type that was on display in the Greenex booth at the OFA trade show was *Scutellaria costa-ricana*. This is a plant we have been working with in Florida because it is a hardy perennial in USDA Zones 9B and higher and because of its incredible flowering potted plant potential. Instead of a long, thin spike of flowers, this *Scutellaria* holds the spike straight up, and it is shaped like a small torch. My description of this plant has always been that it looks like someone lit the tips of the stems on fire when it is in flower. The 1- to 1.5-inch flowers are packed into a 4- to 5-inch spike with each flower changing to orange or yellow at the tip, just like a lit match. This is a really great plant and can be grown in either a 5- to 6-inch pot as a flowering crop (that can be planted outside for the rest of the season), or produced as a 4-inch color item for use in mixed containers or sale as a specialty annual.

The best part about what Greenex was offering is that there

Culture Quickie: *Scutellaria costa-ricana*

Fertilization. Two hundred to 300 ppm liquid feed, or medium level of slow-release is needed in production. Many growers apply a soluble micronutrient mix during the first three weeks of growth.

Watering. Normal, flowering crop watering.

Media. Any well-drained, peat-lite mix will work fine; pH 5.5-6.5. Avoid highly acidic mixes and fertilizers, which drop the pH and stall the crop.

Production Temperatures. Fifty-five to 65° F nights and 65-85° F days. Growth is faster but less compact under higher-temperature production. Also, flowering is reduced at temperatures above 80-85° F.

Light levels. Two thousand to 3,500 foot-candles, avoid full sun; overly bright light will cause scorching and stunting of plants. If stretch in production is a problem, try daminozide or a tank mix with chlormequat chloride (low rates) to control growth, but do not apply once flowers have formed.

Propagation. Unrooted cuttings root in 10-14 days, faster with bottom heat, and can be rooted in flats or directly into 4- to 6-inch pots if desired. A preventative, broad-spectrum fungicide during propagation is also a good idea.

Crop timing. Similar to chrysanthemum scheduling in that plants take two weeks to root, two weeks until pinch, two weeks for new growth, and about 3-4 weeks to finish. Total crop time is 9-12 weeks depending on pot size.

Flowering. Plants don't seem to respond to photoperiod, and flower throughout spring and fall in the South. For Northern use, the presence of cool nights should extend flowering through the summer as well. As an interior plant, the flowers are fairly short-lived, but will continue to bloom in smaller numbers under bright light conditions.

Problems. Spider mites can be an issue with *S. costa-ricana*, so keep a close eye on the crop throughout production.

has only been one color of this species available up until now. The new releases come in a range of colors, from white ('Flamingo') to yellow-orange ('Flame'), deep orange ('Barbary') and red ('Scarlett'), all with dark green foliage and a good branching habit.

I think this crop has potential for

spring and summer color production, and also into other seasons as a flowering potted plant. I have been able to flower the crop in winter in Florida. I highly recommend you give this one a try! 

Rick Schoellhorn is assistant professor of Floriculture at the University

of Florida, Gainesville, Fla. He can be reached by phone at (352) 392-1831 or E-mail at rksch@ifas.ufl.edu.



LearnMore!

For more information related to this article, go to www.onhort.com/LM.CFM/gp090207.