



Best Of The 2006 Poinsettia Trials

Cue the drum roll. Here are the all-star varieties for the 2006 National Poinsettia Trials.

By John Dole and Jim Barrett

This year, our Best of Trials selections are based on the trials at Homewood Nursery and Garden Center, Raleigh, N.C.; North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C.; and University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla. Each location picked the 10 best varieties in their individual trials. Then the nine varieties selected at two or more locations were designated as Best of

Trials for 2006. 'Premium Red' (Dümmen USA) and 'Carousel Dark Red' (Fischer USA) were the only varieties picked at all three locations. There is not a formal score sheet or set criteria for what makes a Best of Trials variety. The individual locations base their selection on a range of characteristics. These include consumer reactions, plant appearance and ease of production. An important

aspect for a new variety is often whether or not it fills an industry need in terms of uniqueness, color and/or finish timing.

The new varieties that made the Best of Trials list this year are:

- 'Carousel Dark Red' (Fischer USA)
- 'Ice Punch' (Ecke Ranch)
- 'Polly's Pink' (Ecke Ranch)
- 'White Christmas' (Selecta First Class)

Best Of Trials Varieties

'Carousel Dark Red' (Fischer USA). 'Carousel Red' is an important red novelty, and 'Carousel Dark Red' is similar but improves on 'Carousel Red' in two important areas. Dark Red finishes about 10 days earlier than Red and is marketable before Thanksgiving without the use of black cloth. Dark Red has a deep-red color compared to the orange-red color of 'Carousel Red'. Our surveys indicated that consumers like this variety. (See the report on all the consumer surveys in the March issue of *GPN*.) Because 'Carousel Dark Red' appears to initiate earlier and is also less vigorous than Red, it will need to be planted about 2-3 weeks earlier than Red.

'Ice Punch' (Ecke Ranch). With its unique color pattern, 'Ice Punch' got a significant response from consumers and probably will be a major novelty variety for several years. This is another new variety that made the Best of Trials list. Growers should note that the bracts emerge as solid red and then the area along the midvein fades to produce the white coloration. Thus, growers will want to give plants time to mature and not ship them too early. 'Ice Punch' is marketable by Thanksgiving. Leaves on 'Ice Punch' are smaller than average, so plants can look thin if grown with too little vegetative time before the start of short days. Postharvest performance is excellent and plants hold up well in shipping.

'Orion Red' (Fischer USA). 'Orion Red' is a major early flowering variety in most of the country. It has large, dark-green leaves and

Best Of Trials Selections					
Variety	Location			Best of the Trials (Selected at two or more locations)	Breeder
	UF	NCSU	Homewood		
Christmas Feelings series	X				Selecta First Class
'Christmas Star'		X			Selecta First Class
'Carousel Dark Red'	X	X	X	XX	Fischer USA
Enduring Red series	X				Ecke Ranch
'Estrella Red'			X		Florema
'Ice Punch'	X	X		XX	Ecke Ranch
Mars series			X		Fischer USA
'Metro'	X				Dümmen USA
'Orion Red'		X	X	XX	Fischer USA
'Pink Cadillac'			X		Dümmen USA
'Polly's Pink'	X	X		XX	Ecke Ranch
'Premium Picasso'	X	X		XX	Dümmen USA
'Premium Red'	X	X	X	XX	Dümmen USA
'Prestige Early Red'	X				Ecke Ranch
'Prestige Maroon'		X	X	XX	Ecke Ranch
'Prestige Red'		X	X	XX	Ecke Ranch
'Red Dragon'			X		Fischer USA
'Stargazer Red'			X		Florema
'White Christmas'	X	X		XX	Selecta First Class

Figure 1. The Best of Trials selections are based on trials at Homewood Nursery and Garden Centers, Raleigh, N.C.; North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C.; and University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla. Each location picked the 10 best varieties in their individual trials. Then the nine varieties selected at two or more locations were designated as Best of the Trials for 2006.



NATIONAL POINSETTIA TRIALS

bright-red bracts; 'Orion Red' can produce a very attractive plant. It is very stable, which means its appearance has not drifted over time. Unfortunately, this stability has resulted in it not producing good colors and only red is available. Orion is an attractive, reliable cultivar with excellent branching, uniformity and bract development.

'Polly's Pink' (Ecke Ranch). This novel, new variety has a vivid, bright-pink color that is a significant addition to the otherwise lackluster pink pallet. See the description in the new variety article, page 20. This is an easy plant to grow and branches well. It has medium vigor, so it is fairly easy to grow in smaller sizes but has the vigor and strength for large containers. Postharvest performance is good, and the bright color does not fade. In University of Florida consumer surveys, 'Polly's Pink' was the first choice out of six pink varieties compared. In the first couple of years, retailers may want to position this as a novelty to capture some value from its uniqueness.

'Premium Picasso' (Dümmen USA). The bract colors and pattern of this variety are similar to 'Monet Twilight', which is a strong favorite in consumer studies. Unfortunately, 'Monet Twilight' is not the easiest variety to grow. 'Premium Picasso' ranked high in our consumer evaluations this year and is a significant variety because it finishes early (mid-

November), is easy to produce, is a strong plant and has good postharvest quality. This type of color pattern in poinsettias (as is the case with jingle bell and peppermint types) is typically not uniform, and stock plants are difficult for breeders to manage. The breeder company is doing well with keeping Picasso as uniform as possible. 'Premium Picasso' does seem to be slightly less vigorous than 'Premium Red'.

'Premium Red' (Dümmen USA). This variety is gaining importance in the poinsettia market in both cool and warm climates. The plants are strong and have a nice, flat bract presentation. In warm climates, its low vigor makes it easier and stronger compared to most other reds finishing at the same time. While in cool climates, its stem strength makes a nice, large plant when given sufficient production time before the start of short days. Another important feature of this red is the full compliment of colors to go with it.

'Prestige Maroon' (Ecke Ranch). This variety, in its second year, has two important features: First is the branch strength and growth habit of 'Prestige Red', and second are the distinctive bracts. It also has the same excellent postharvest characteristics as 'Prestige Red'. 'Prestige Maroon' has performed very well in the North Carolina and Purdue University trials both years, so for most of the country, this variety has important

potential as a novelty color. 'Prestige Maroon' was ranked number three by consumers among 45 cultivars at Homewood Nursery. However, it has not performed as well in the Florida trials and Deep South growers indicate it might have problems in the warmest production areas from Texas across to Florida. In high temperatures, 'Prestige Maroon' may finish much later, have less vigor and exhibit weaker stems compared to 'Prestige Red'.

'Prestige Red' (Ecke Ranch). Only a few years after its introduction, 'Prestige Red' has become the number-one variety in terms of number of units produced. The most important characteristic is that 'Prestige Red' has the strongest branch structure of all major commercial varieties. Also important is that consumers like it. 'Prestige Red' always ranks higher than 'Freedom Red' in consumer surveys. 'Prestige Red' is very flexible and can be grown in all container sizes, and it works well in both mass-market and upscale production. A notable problem with 'Prestige Red' is that it is more sensitive to heat delay than most other important varieties. Therefore, finish timing is less predictable in regions or warm years when temperatures at the end of September and early October cannot be controlled. It will be interesting to see how the use of the new 'Prestige

Early Red' develops and meshes with 'Prestige Red'.

'White Christmas' (Selecta First Class). The breeder company has replaced the old 'White Christmas' with this new one, which is a nice improvement and fills a void in the current varieties. This is especially important considering the use of white cultivars for painted poinsettias. For growers looking for the poinsettia with one of the best white colors, this is it. Also, 'White Christmas' finishes the first week of December after most of the other good white varieties, which alleviates the need to hold other cultivars past their primes. Growth habit is generally upright, and vigor is low to medium. It is a medium-green leaf variety. 

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