



# Best of Show

Many of the varieties trialed in the 2007 showed promise at one location, but only a select few emerged as the top dogs with high markings at multiple sites.

By Jim Barrett and John Dole

The best of trials were selected from the trials at North Carolina State, the University of Florida and Pleasant View Gardens, where the cooperators were Karolina Dworzak and Deke Jackson. Each location picked the 10 best varieties in their individual trials. Then, the varieties selected at two or more locations were designated as Best of Trials for 2007. 'Prestige Red' was the only variety picked at all three locations. This year, none of the new introductions made the best of trials list, and some older varieties reclaimed their spots.

The individual locations base their selection for best varieties on a range of characteristics, including

consumer reactions, plant appearance and ease of production. An important consideration for newer varieties is often whether it fills an industry need in terms of uniqueness, color and/or finish timing. Many of the newer varieties are excellent but not distinctly better than existing varieties. As the number and quality of varieties increases, it is harder for new varieties to find a niche.

### The "Best of" Varieties

'Cortez Burgundy'. When introduced a few years ago, 'Cortez Burgundy' was the hot new novelty variety. While it is no longer new, it has become a standard novelty and still receives

among the highest evaluations in consumer-preference surveys. It is generally easy to grow, and many growers use 'Cortez Burgundy' even if they do not grow other Cortez colors. It finishes a little later than 'Cortez Red', and some growers use black cloth to bring it in earlier. A weakness is post-harvest performance, where the bracts seem to age rapidly, lose their bright burgundy color and become darker. Sporting back to red can be a problem, but the incidence of sporting has been generally low in the past few years. Growers in warm climates should be aware that it is sensitive to high temperatures and avoid growing it in the hottest environments.

**Enduring series.** 'Enduring Pink' has become one of the more widely used pink cultivars in the South, and its use in the North is expanding. The red, white and marble colors in the Enduring series were introduced recently, all relatively close in growth habit and finish timing. Finish timing is early. The plants have lower than average vigor and are very easy to grow. The Enduring series performs well in both 6- and 6½-inch production. A distinctive feature of the Enduring varieties is that the bracts are held at different angles and do not lay flat on top of the plant. The colors are brighter than most other dark leaf varieties.

**'Carousel Dark Red'.** 'Carousel Red' is an important red novelty, and 'Carousel Dark Red' is similar but improves on 'Carousel Red' in two important areas: First, Dark Red finishes about 10 days earlier than Red and is marketable before Thanksgiving under natural days. And Dark Red has a deep-red color compared to the orange tone of 'Carousel Red'. Consumer surveys indicate that consumers like this variety. If switching from 'Carousel Red', be aware it will take some production changes to get it to adequate size. Because 'Carousel Dark Red' appears to initiate earlier and is also less vigorous than 'Carousel Red', it will need to be planted two to three weeks earlier.

**'Marblestar'.** This variety was entered in the 2007 trial after being excluded for a couple of years. It has been around for several years and is established as an important novelty. While it is no longer "new and different," it is still the consumer's favored marble variety. 'Marblestar' can produce very attractive plants. An issue with 'Marblestar' is that if it is stressed, the leaves tend to be smaller and curled under at the margins. The leaves of 'Marblestar'

Best Of Trials Selections					
Variety	Location			Best of the Trials (Selected at two or more locations)	Breeder
	UF	NCSU	Pleasant View		
'Carousel Dark Red'	X	X		XX	Fischer USA
Christmas Feelings series	X				Selecta First Class
'Christmas Star'		X			Selecta First Class
'Cortez Burgundy'	X		X	XX	Fischer USA
'Crazy Christmas'			X		Selecta First Class
Enduring series	X		X	XX	Ecke Ranch
'Euroglory'			X		Dümmen USA
'Infinity'			X		Dümmen USA
'Marblestar'	X		X	XX	Fischer USA
'Mars Red'		X	X	XX	Fischer USA
'Orion Red'		X	X	XX	Fischer USA
'Polly's Pink'	X	X		XX	Ecke Ranch
'Premium Picasso'	X	X		XX	Dümmen USA
'Premium Red'	X	X		XX	Dümmen USA
'Prestige Early Red'	X				Ecke Ranch
'Prestige Maroon'		X	X	XX	Ecke Ranch
'Prestige Red'	X	X	X	XXX	Ecke Ranch
'White Christmas'	X	X		XX	Selecta First Class
'Whitestar'			X		Fischer USA

Figure 1. Each trial location picked the 10 best varieties in their individual trials. Then the varieties selected at two or more locations were designated as Best of the Trials for 2007.



## NATIONAL POINSETTIA TRIALS

have light-colored areas along the edges that resemble Cycocel (chloromequat chloride) injury, but consumers do not seem to notice the leaves and buy the plant for its distinctive bracts.

**'Mars Red'.** 'Mars Red' has emerged as a reliable midseason red. It performs well in a variety of situations. Flowering among the plants is uniform, and branching is excellent. Bracts tend to be on the small side, so handle accordingly and avoid a cool finish. Several colors have been developed to complement 'Mars Red', including white, pink, marble and a slightly brighter red called Fire.

**'Orion Red'.** 'Orion Red' has large, dark-green leaves and large bright-red bracts and can produce quite an attractive plant. It is well established as a major early-flowering variety in most of the country. Orion is very stable, which means that its appearance has not drifted over time. However, the tradeoff for this stability has resulted in it not producing good colors. Orion is a reliable cultivar with excellent branching, uniformity and bract development.

**'Polly's Pink'.** This new novel pink variety has a vivid, bright color that is a significant addition to the assortment of pink varieties. The bright fluorescent pink bracts

were mildly ruffled and slightly upright facing. Both the young and old bracts are a similar color, in contrast to many pinks in which the older bracts tend to fade. 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 larger containers. Finish timing is midseason. Postharvest performance is good, and the bright color does not fade. In consumer surveys at both NCSU and UF, 'Polly's Pink' was the top rated of all the pinks. In the first couple of years, retailers may want to position this as a novelty to capture some value from its uniqueness.

**'Premium Picasso'.** The bract colors and pattern of this variety are generally similar to 'Monet Twilight', which has been a strong consumer favorite. 'Premium Picasso' ranked high in our consumer evaluations and is a significant variety because it finishes early (mid-November), is easy to produce, is strong 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'. Consequently, extra time should be added in the schedule if you are planning to grow large plants.

**'Premium Red'.** The use of 'Premium Red' is increasing in both cool and warm climates. The plants are strong with 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 large plant when given sufficient production time before the start of short days. There is a full range of colors to accompany 'Premium Red', which adds to its utility.

**'Prestige Maroon'.** This variety has two important features: First is the branch strength and growth habit of 'Prestige Red', and second are its distinctive bracts. It also has the same excellent postharvest characteristics as 'Prestige Red'. 'Prestige Maroon' has performed very well in the North Carolina, Purdue and Pleasant View trials, so for most of the country this variety has important potential as a novelty color. However, it has not performed as well in the Florida trials, and Deep South growers indicate potential problems in the warmest production areas, from Texas

across to Florida. In high temperatures, 'Prestige Maroon' tends to finish much later, have less vigor and exhibit weaker stems, compared to 'Prestige Red'.

**'Prestige Red'.** 'Prestige Red' has become the No. 1 variety in terms of number of units produced. A major reason for this is that 'Prestige Red' has one of the strongest branch structures of all major commercial varieties. Consumers also love it: 'Prestige Red' always ranks above 'Freedom Red' in consumer surveys. 'Prestige Red' is 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 in late September and early October cannot be controlled. GPN

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