



## NATIONAL POINSETTIA TRIALS

# Consumer Choices

New poinsettia introductions and classic favorites were put to the test during the last National Poinsettia Trials. The following varieties stood out in the eyes of the most important critics: consumers.

By Roberto Lopez, John Dole and Jim Barrett



*From top: Purdue open house display; consumers evaluate all 95 cultivars at Purdue; poinsettias displayed in the greenhouse.*

The National Poinsettia Trials evaluate experimental and new varieties to provide greenhouse growers and breeders with information on how they perform in the northern, central and southern regions of the United States and compare them with older standard varieties. In addition to evaluating poinsettia cultivars, the University of Florida, North Carolina State University, Purdue University and Homewood Nursery opened their doors to the public and asked consumers to evaluate the poinsettias on display.

### University of Florida (Gainesville, Fla.)

At the University of Florida, more than 400 consumers evaluated plants displayed in the greenhouse. Participants were asked to name their 10 favorite cultivars out of the 99 on display. Selected cultivars also were arranged in groups, and participants were asked to choose their favorite three novelty and red poinsettias and favorite white, pink, marble and peppermint. Plants were numbered and not labeled with a cultivar name. No incentives were provided to the public for voting.

### North Carolina State University (Raleigh, N.C.)

At North Carolina State, all 102 cultivars were displayed indoors under fluorescent lighting, labeled with their cultivar name, for consumers to evaluate. To make the survey easier for the 160 attendees, cultivars were organized into six categories: novelty, red, white, pink, marble and peppermint. Consumers were asked to choose their three favorite cultivars out of all the cultivars on display and their three favorite cultivars within each group. Attendees were not offered an incentive for completing the survey.

### Purdue University (West Lafayette, Ind.)

For the first time, a consumer open house was conducted on the Purdue University campus. Even with the cold and snowy weather, 255 par-

ticipants attended the event. Consumers were asked to fill out a poinsettia preference and a sustainable poinsettia survey with the incentive of receiving a raffle ticket for a chance to win one of 24 poinsettia plants. All 95 cultivars were labeled with names and numbers and displayed indoors under fluorescent lighting. Participants were asked to choose their 10 favorite cultivars out of all those on display. In a separate room, selected cultivars were organized into four categories — novelty, red, white and pink — and labeled with a number, and participants were asked to choose their three favorite cultivars within each group.

### Homewood Nursery (Raleigh, N.C.)

At Homewood Nursery, customers filled out 670 surveys from Nov. 22 to Dec. 13, 2008. Consumers were asked to select their five favorite cultivars out of 40 cultivars on display. No incentives were offered to customers for filling out a survey.

### Consumer Consensus

For a second time, the celebrity of the trials was 'Ice Punch' from Paul Ecke Ranch. Consumers in Florida, Indiana and North Carolina once again fell in love with the bright, rosy-red bracts with icy-white centers. More than 60 percent of the public ranked 'Ice Punch' as their favorite cultivar out of 40 to 99 cultivars displayed. At all three university trial sites, it was the favorite novelty cultivar on display. The cultivar also ranks well with growers as it has a freely branching habit, mid-season flowering response and excellent post-production longevity. In addition, it is no longer an exclusive cultivar, so 'Ice Punch' will be available to all growers in 2009.

'Cortez Burgundy' from Syngenta Flowers was once again an overall favorite among survey participants at all four locations. Although it is a cultivar that was introduced nearly eight years ago, consumers are still attracted to its unique dark burgundy-red bracts, which age to dark red.

Among cultivars that ranked in the top 10 in at least three locations were Dümmer USA's





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## University of Florida Consumer Open House Results

Overall Favorite (out of all 99 cultivars)	% selecting this cultivar
'Ice Punch'	62
'Ecke 54-06'	36
'Sonora White Glitter'	33
'Picasso Punch'	27 (tie)
'Christmas Feelings Merlot'	27 (tie)
'Orange Spice'	26 (tie)
'Carousel Dark Red'	26 (tie)
'Cortez Burgundy'	25
'Mars Red'	23
'Marblestar'	22 (tie)
'Winter Rose Early Red'	22 (tie)

Top Novelty	% in Top 3
'Ice Punch'	27
'Sonora White Glitter'	15
'Ecke 54-06'	14
'Cortez Burgundy'	13
'Visions of Grandeur'	11
'Dulce Rosa'	5 (tie)
'Winter Rose Dark Red'	5 (tie)
'Crazy Christmas'	4 (tie)
'Cinnamon Stick'	4 (tie)
'Silverstar Red'	3

Top Red	% in Top 3
'Prestige Red'	17
'Mars Red'	15
'Classic Red'	14
'Advent Red'	12
'Early Orion'	11 (tie)
'Christmas Feelings Merlot'	11 (tie)
'Novia'	9
'Premium Red'	5
'EuroGlory'	4
'Flame'	3

Favorite White	%
'Arctic White'	46
'Freedom Early White'	23
'Whitestar'	16
'Polar Bear'	13
'Early White'	2

Favorite Pink	%
'Polly's Pink'	71
'Mars Pink'	12
'Pink Cadillac'	8
'Christmas Angel Pink'	6
'Classic Pink'	3

Favorite Peppermint	%
'Marco Polo'	48
'Da Vinci'	38
'Christmas Feelings Cinnamon'	7
'Freedom Peppermint'	5
'Cinnamon Star'	2

Favorite Marble	%
'Marblestar'	60
'Christmas Angel Marble'	17
'Ecke 130-06'	13
'Winter Blush'	7
'Mars Marble'	3

*Table 1. During the University of Florida Consumer Open House held on Dec. 11, 2008, participants were shown all 99 cultivars labeled with a name and asked to select their 10 favorites overall. For the red and novelty favorites, consumers were asked to rank their top three. For the other groups, they were asked to select one. These plants were labeled with only a number.*



*Consumers rate their favorite poinsettias at the University of Florida trials.*

'Premium Picasso', Paul Ecke Ranch's 'Ecke 54-06' and 'Polly's Pink', and Syngenta Flowers' 'Carousel Dark Red' and 'Sonora White Glitter'. Ecke's cultivar '54-06' is not yet available to growers but has potential to be a very important jingle-bell type for the South thanks to its upright habit, good branching and stem strength.

### Reliable Reds

Coming to a consensus from North to South can be challenging for consumers when more than 50 percent of all the cultivars in the national trials are red cultivars. 'Mars Red', 'Prestige Red' and 'Classic Red' were selected as the best reds in 2008 in at least two locations. Southern voters ranked 'Prestige Red', 'Mars Red' and 'Classic Red' as their favorite reds at the University of Florida trial. Participants at NCSU chose 'Castor Red', 'Olympus' and 'Mars Red', while those at Homewood Nursery selected 'Prestige Red', 'Viking' and 'Premium Red'. Northern voters selected 'Red Elf', 'Classic Red', and 'Novia' as their top reds at the Purdue trial.

### Winter Whites

For more than three years, 'White Christmas' has been selected by the public as their favorite white cultivar. At both the NCSU and Purdue trial sites, it was in the top 10 overall favorites ♦



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## North Carolina State University Consumer Open House Results

Overall Favorite (out of all 102 cultivars)	Rank
'Ecke 54-06'	1
'Ice Crystal'	2
'Sonora White Glitter'	3
'Ice Punch'	4
'Polly's Pink'	5
'Pink Candy'	6
'White Christmas'	7 (tie)
'Christmas Feelings Merlot'	7 (tie)
'Orange Spice'	9
'Premium Picasso'	10 (tie)
'Cortez Burgundy'	10 (tie)

Favorite Novelty	Rank
'Ice Punch'	1 (tie)
'Sonora White Glitter'	1 (tie)
'Ice Crystal'	3
'Ecke 54-06'	4
'Orange Spice'	5

Favorite Red	Rank
'Castor Red'	1
'Olympus'	2
'Mars Red'	3
'Orion Red'	4 (tie)
'Autumn Red'	4 (tie)
'Late Season Red'	6 (tie)
'Mercurius Red'	6 (tie)
'Early Glory'	8 (tie)
'Christmas Feelings Red'	8 (tie)
'Novia'	10

Favorite White	Rank
'White Christmas'	1
'Christmas Feelings White'	2
'Snowcap'	3

Favorite Pink	Rank
'Polly's Pink'	1
'Christmas Angel Pink'	2
'Christmas Feelings Pink'	3

Favorite Peppermint	Rank
'Pink Candy'	1
'Da Vinci'	2
'Cinnamon Stick'	3

Favorite Marble	Rank
'Christmas Angel Marble'	1
'Sonora Marble'	2
'Marblestar'	3

*Table 2. During the North Carolina State University Consumer Open House held on Dec. 4, 2008, cultivars were organized and displayed into six groups: novelty, red, white, pink, peppermint and marble. The 160 attendees were asked to choose their three favorite cultivars from each group as well as their overall three favorites from the 102 on display.*

## Purdue University Consumer Open House Results

Overall Favorite (out of all 95 cultivars)	% selecting this cultivar
'Ice Punch'	66
'Red Elf'	51
'Cortez Burgundy'	41
'White Christmas'	32
'Polly's Pink'	31
'Cortez Electric Fire'	29 (tie)
'Christmas Feelings'	29 (tie)
'Classic Red'	28
'Christmas Feelings Select'	27 (tie)
'Early Joy Red'	27 (tie)
'Carousel Dark Red'	25
'Premium Picasso'	24

*Table 3. During the Purdue Consumer Open House held on Dec. 6, 2008, the 255 attendees were asked to select their 10 favorite cultivars out of the 95 on display. In a separate room, select novelty, red, white and pink cultivars were grouped, and attendees chose their three favorites from each group. In every category, participants also had the option of indicating that they did not like any of the plants. For filling out a survey, attendees were given a raffle ticket for a chance to win a poinsettia.*

Favorite Novelty	% in Top 3
'Ice Punch'	26
'Premium Picasso'	19
'Carousel Dark Red'	15
'Silverstar Red'	11
'Christmas Angel Marble'	9
'Orange Spice'	7
'Cinnamon Stick'	6
'Peppermint Twist'	4
Do not like	3

Favorite Red	% in Top 3
'Red Elf'	25
'Classic Red'	22
'Novia'	18
'Christmas Feelings Select'	17
'Viking'	9
'Prestige'	8
Do not like	1

Favorite White	% in Top 3
'Snowcap White'	27
'Early White'	23
'Polar Bear'	17
'Premium White'	14
'Christmas Angel White'	13
'Freedom Early White'	5
Do not like	0.9

Favorite Pink	% in Top 3
'Maren'	25
'Polly's Pink'	22
'Sonora Pink'	20
'Christmas Feelings Pink'	11
'Mars Pink'	10
'Premium Lipstick Pink'	9
Do not like	2

list. Both old and new cultivars were also selected as the favorite whites. Those cultivars receiving more than 25 percent of the favorite white cultivar vote included 'Artic White' and 'Snowcap White'.

### Perfect Pinks

Not surprisingly, 'Polly's Pink' was once again the standout pink cultivar thanks to its very bright, almost fluorescent pink bracts. It was the favorite pink

at the University of Florida and NCSU. Other pink cultivars that were ranked at several locations include 'Mars Pink', 'Christmas Feelings Pink' and 'Christmas Angel Pink'.

### Results Take-Home

We hope the trial results presented in the three articles help growers and breeders focus on which cultivars might be a best fit in the coming years. These trials



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Young consumers, such as this young lady filling out a survey at the University of Florida, offer a fresh perspective on today's shoppers' preferences.

## Overall Favorite Poinsettias at Homewood Nursery and Garden Center

Rank	Cultivar (Out of 40 cultivars)	% selecting this cultivar
1	'Ice Punch'	67
2	'Ecke 54-06'	32
3	'Sonora White Glitter'	31
4	'Carousel Dark Red'	24
5	'Prestige'	21
6	'Christmas Angel Marble'	19 (tie)
6	'Premium Miro'	19 (tie)
7	'Cortez Burgundy'	18.5
8	'Winter Rose Early Red'	18
9	'Viking'	14
10	'Winter Rose Early Pink'	13

**Table 4.** During the Homewood Nursery & Garden Center retail customer survey conducted from Nov. 22 to Dec. 13, 2008, 670 surveys were completed: 73 percent women and 23 percent men (4 percent declined to specify their gender). Each of the 40 poinsettia cultivars displayed were identified by a number. Customers were asked to select their five favorite without ranking them; not all customers chose five cultivars.

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instrumental in bringing these trials to fruition are our dedicated greenhouse staff, undergraduate and graduate students, including technicians Ingram McCall at North Carolina State University, ◆

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*Above: The celebrity of the trials was 'Ice Punch' from Ecke. Below: A proud winner of the consumer raffle shows off his poinsettia spoils.*



Carolyn Bartuska at the University of Florida, and Diane Camberato at Purdue University. [GPN](http://www.gpn.com)

**Roberto Lopez is an assistant professor and floriculture extension specialist at Purdue University. John Dole is a professor of floriculture at North Carolina State University. Jim Barrett is professor of floriculture at University of Florida. They can be reached at [rglovez@purdue.edu](mailto:rglovez@purdue.edu), [john\\_dole@ncsu.edu](mailto:john_dole@ncsu.edu) and [jbarrett@ufl.edu](mailto:jbarrett@ufl.edu), respectively.**

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