

# The Cut Flower Seed Trials

Growers and trialers present the latest trial results on some of the best new seed varieties.

By John Dole

**H**ave you been in an electronics store lately? Recently, I tried to count all the different kinds of digital cameras and couldn't, and don't get me started on the different kinds of cellular phones that are available. Does the world really need a watermelon-colored phone? If you haven't been in an electronic store, then how about a grocery store? The days of six breakfast cereals are long gone. Today, "new" and "different" are used to sell almost everything, and flowers are no different. The challenge with all of the new cut flowers is deciding which ones are best. Just as *Consumer Reports* evaluates the value of electronics, the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers (ASCFG) annually evaluates which new cuts are most likely to succeed.

For the seed trial, there were 57 volunteer trialers from all over the United States (including Hawaii and Canada) — 42 returned results. The trialers are primarily commercial growers of all-sized operations and include a handful of universities and suppliers. In addition, all cultivars are grown and evaluated at North Carolina State University (NC State), Raleigh, N.C., Zone 7. Trialers provide evaluations at the end of the year to NC State. Full details — including comments made by tri-

alers about the cultivars — can be found in *The Cut Flower Quarterly*.

## Ageratum

Ageratum is a cut flower with a mixed reputation — a filler flower with a great color but not always worth the time it takes to pick the stems after the heads and stems get small, which they inevitably seem to do. Thus, we looked forward to seeing how 'High Tide Blue' and 'High Tide White' (PanAmerican Seed) were going to do in the trials. As the film critics say — one thumb up and one thumb down. While both cultivars were prolific, only 'High Tide White' produced long enough stems to be commercially acceptable as a cut flower crop. The heads started out large and stayed reasonably sized the entire season. Several trialers noted that the flower heads browned quickly, a common occurrence with white ageratum, indicating the plant has to be picked regularly.

On the other hand, 'High Tide Blue' started out short and stayed short the entire season. As one visitor to the NC State cut flower trials noted: "nice bedding plant," which is not what one wants to hear in a cut flower trial. Interestingly, both cultivars rebounded with long, strong stems and large heads at the very end of the season. At least two other trialers noted the same thing. ♦



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Clockwise from top left: snapdragon 'Potomac Cherry Rose'; ammi 'Graceland'; delphinium 'Candle Violet Shades'; zinnia 'Uproar Rose'; sunflower 'Pro Cut Yellow Lite'. (Photos: John Dole)





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## variety information

Unfortunately, the handful of nice stems at the end of the season was not enough to make 'High Tide Blue' viable as a cut flower.

### Delphinium

Over the last couple of years, we have tested two series of hybrid delphinium — Guardian from PanAmerican Seed and Aurora from American Takii. This year we added a third series to the list, delphinium Candle from Sakata Seed America, and it was a great one. Four colors were included in the trial — Blue Shades, Lavender Shades, Violet Shades and



**Top:** ageratium 'High Tide Blue'. **Middle:** aster 'Hulk'. **Bottom:** trachelium 'Lake Louise Purple'.

White Shades. Candle produced long stems of large, beautiful florets in a short amount of time. Trialers were able to harvest up to six stems per plant, and those growing delphiniums in cooler climates were able to get a return flush of flowers. While the trials focused on field production, these delphinium are fast enough to be profitable in hoop houses and greenhouses.

### Lisianthus

PanAmerican Seed has reorganized its lisianthus offerings to make them easier to understand and also submitted several new cultivars to the trial this year. The breeder combined its double-flowered types — Avila, Balboa and Catalina — into one series known as ABC and their single-flowered types — Laguna and Malibu — into the Laguna series. The names are followed with a number referring to the optimum season or day and night production temperatures: 62-66° F days and 55-60° F nights for the 1-2 group; 66-70° F days and 64° F nights for the 2-3 group; and 68-71° F days and 65° F nights for the 3-4 group. Obviously, groups 2-3 and 3-4 are best for outdoor, summer, field production. This year, two of the cultivars, 'ABC 3-4 Purple' (formerly 'Catalina Purple') and 'ABC 2-3 Rose' (formerly 'Balboa Rose'), performed well enough to be nominated for ASCFG Cut Flower of the Year due to long stems and beautiful flowers.

### Pepper

The experimental pepper from Kieft Seeds Holland, labeled 'Cappa Conic White/Red' for now, put on a great show, producing 2-ft.-tall plants covered with large fruit. The fruit started out pale whitish-green, matured to bright orange and finished scarlet. The strong branches were covered with fruit that tended to mature at once, making the stems easy to harvest. Trialers were able to harvest up to 11 stems per plant with an average harvest of four stems per plant.

### Snapdragon

Snapdragons are another important specialty cut, evidenced by the fact that we had 10 cultivars from four companies in the trials. Two of the highest-scoring cultivars were 'Animation Deep Orange' and 'Animation Yellow Improve' from Ernst Benary of America. Trialers loved both cultivars for their strong colors, high productivity and good return flowering after the first cut. 'Overture Orange' from Goldsmith Seeds and 'Potomac Cherry Rose' from PanAmerican Seed also scored well, the latter having stems up to 30 inches long.

### Sunflower

Another long-time favorite of specialty cut flower growers is the sunflower, of which we had five cultivars in the trials this year. The top-rated cultivar was 'Pro Cut Yellow Lite' from Seed Sense; it has bright-yellow petals and orange-yellow center florets. It produced stems that averaged 40 inches long and received high marks for uniformity and earliness. The other single-stemmed, pollenless Pro Cut cultivars, Peach and Red/Lemon Bicolor, also performed well in the trials. The striking bronze and



### EPA Grants TriStar™ Insecticide

#### Non-Agricultural Use Label Amendment

**Dayton, N.J. (February 2006)** – Cleary Chemical Corporation announces that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has accepted a label amendment to include the WPS non-agricultural use re-entry instructions for TriStar™ 70 WSP insecticide. The amendment means that TriStar can be used by professional lawn and landscape contractors in residential and commercial applications for effective control of a broad range of insects without the 12 hour REI.



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## variety information

yellow of Red/Lemon Bicolor was especially noted. 'Orange Queen' and 'Orange King' from Fred C. Gloeckner & Company scored well with the trialers, who noted the classic sunflower coloring of orange petals and dark centers, sturdy stems and uniform flowering. 'Orange Queen' was a shade or two lighter than 'Orange King'.

### Tracheliums

I have a confession to make. I love dark-purple tracheliums. At first it may seem like a misguided love. The flower heads are rather unassuming, almost unattractive. However, when they fully open with their large clusters of tiny, deep-purple flowers and richly colored stems, they make great filler flowers. There is one problem — we cannot grow them in the field. In the greenhouse, we get wonderful long-stemmed, large-headed cuts, but in the field we get short stems and small flowers. Year after year, we try to grow tracheliums in the field, and they just do not perform well. Unfortunately, other trialers have been frustrated by this plant also. In our defense, we are getting better at them, and this year we actually had many harvestable stems.

The problem with trachelium is threefold — it has a rather narrow optimum temperature range, resents drying out and is a long-day plant. Trachelium grows best at night temperatures of 55-60° F but is not cold-hardy, so it cannot be planted too

Cultivar	Seed Trial Ratings									
	Yield (stems/plant)	Stem length (inches)	Market appreciation rating*			Repeat again rating*	Ease of cultivation rating*	Average spacing (in./plant)	Average postharvest life	
			Whole.	Retail	Consumer					
Ageratum 'High Tide Blue' (PA)	9.1 1-20	12.6 6-18	2.9 1-5	2.6 1-4	3.1 1-5	2.6 1-5	4.1 2-5	142 36-576	6.4 5-9	
Ageratum 'High Tide White' (PA)	20.1 2-120	14.9 8-24	3.0 2-4	3.1 2-4	3.3 1-5	2.8 1-5	4.3 3-5	193 36-576	7.6 5-14	
Ammi 'Graceland' (KS)	6.9 1-20	23.8 6-36	3.3 3-4	3.4 2-4	3.8 2-5	3.1 1-4	3.8 2-5	147 9-576	6.8 5-9	
Antirrhinum 'Animation Deep Orange' (EB)	6.9 0-15	16.9 12-21	3.3 1-5	3.3 1-5	3.3 1-5	3.6 1-5	4.2 3-5	164 36-432	6.6 4-9	
Antirrhinum 'Animation Pink Imp.' (EB)	7.0 3-10	19.0 14-24	3.0 3	3.0 3	3.6 3-5	3.1 1-5	4.4 4-5	138 36-432	7.6 7-9	
Antirrhinum 'Animation Rose' (EB)	6.3 3-9	16.8 15-18	3.0 3	3.7 3-5	4.0 3-5	3.4 2-5	4.0 2-5	206 48-432	6.6 4-9	
Antirrhinum 'Animation Velvet Red' (EB)	9.9 5-19	17.9 14-21	3.0 2-4	3.8 2-5	4.3 3-5	4.3 2-5	4.3 4-5	179 48-432	7.1 4-9	
Antirrhinum 'Animation Yellow Imp.' (EB)	8.3 6-14	18.3 15-20	3.0 3	3.7 3-4	3.6 3-4	3.4 3-4	4.4 2-5	142 48-432	7.5 7-9	
Antirrhinum 'Charming White' (FG)	4.9 1-16	19.6 15-32	3.0 2-4	2.8 2-4	3.0 2-4	2.9 1-5	3.6 2.5	110 16-432	6.9 5-9	
Antirrhinum 'Overture Orange' (GS)	7.8 6-17	18.1 16-21	3.5 3-4	3.5 3-4	4.0 3-5	4.1 3-5	4.0 3-5	131 36-432	7.1 6-9	
Antirrhinum 'Potomac Cherry Rose' (PA)	4.0 1-9	22.9 15-30	4.0 3-5	3.7 3-5	3.3 1-5	3.2 1-5	4.3 3-5	128 36-432	11.3 7-21	
Antirrhinum 'Potomac Red Imp.' (PA)	5.8 1-18	21.9 13-27	3.5 2-5	2.7 2-3	3.2 2-4	3.0 1-5	4.3 3-5	125 36-432	9.5 5-21	
Antirrhinum 'Potomac White Imp.' (PA)	5.0 1-11	20.1 14-26	n/a n/a	3.0 3	3.2 3-4	2.8 1-4	4.3 3-5	150 36-432	6.8 6-7	
Callistephus 'Daylight Blue Frost' (TA)	5.3 1-16	20.9 16-28	2.0 1-3	2.5 1-4	3.2 1-5	2.1 1-4	3.3 1-4	126 16-324	14.0 14	
Callistephus 'Daylight Pink Frost' (TA)	4.4 1-10	19.7 12-28	2.5 2-3	1.7 1-2	3.3 2-5	2.6 1-5	3.2 1-4	126 16-324	3.0 3	
Callistephus 'Hulk' (EB)	3.8 1-10	16.1 12-24	2.3 1-5	2.0 1-4	2.5 1-4	2.3 1-5	3.1 1-5	147 36-576	7.0 7	
Capsicum Exp. (KS)	4.0 1-11	18.4 5-24	3.0 2-4	2.5 1-4	3.6 1-5	3.8 2-5	4.2 2-5	161 36-360	14.0 14	

Figure 1. The first row of data for each cultivar is the average, and the second row is the range of responses. When only one response is listed, either only one person responded for that category or several responded and all gave the same rating. \*Ratings are based on a 1-5 scale, with 5 being the best. Market ratings are based on sales to wholesalers, retailers or final consumers.

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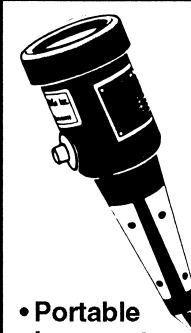
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Cultivar	Yield (stems/plant)	Stem length (inches)	Market appreciation rating*			Repeat again rating*	Ease of cultivation rating*	Average spacing (in. <sup>2</sup> /plant)	Average postharvest life
			Whole.	Retail	Consumer				
Delphinium 'Candle Blue Shades' (SA)	2.7 1-6	25.6 16-38	4.3 4-5	3.7 3-4	3.8 3-4	3.1 1-5	3.4 2-5	132 36-324	6.1 5-7
Delphinium 'Candle Lavender Shades' (SA)	2.1 1-4	25.4 18-38	3.0 1-4	3.5 1-4	3.7 1-4	3.3 1-5	3.0 1-5	118 36-192	6.7 4-10
Delphinium 'Candle Violet Shades' (SA)	1.6 1-3	27.4 21-38	4.0 4	4.0 4	3.7 3-4	2.6 1-4	3.3 2-5	142 80-192	6.0 5-7
Delphinium 'Candle White Shades' (SA)	2.4 1-6	28.8 18-40	4.0 4	4.0 3-4	3.8 3-4	3.3 2-5	3.1 2-5	138 36-324	6.2 5-7
Delphinium 'Guardian Blue' (PA)	3.7 1-12	23.8 18-40	n/a n/a	4.3 4-5	4.0 3-5	3.9 3-5	3.4 2-5	130 36-324	6.0 5-7
Dianthus 'Radiant Purple Eye' (FG)	3.1 1-10	12.5 6-20	1.7 1-5	2.0 1-3	2.6 1-5	2.0 1-4	3.7 1-5	124 16-324	6.0 3-8
Dianthus 'Radiant Red Eye' (FG)	4.5 1-10	12.1 7-20	2.3 2-3	3.0 2-4	2.3 1-4	2.3 1-4	3.5 2-5	86 16-288	8.0 7-10
Dianthus 'Radiant Scarlet' (FG)	5.9 1-13	11.8 7-18	2.8 2-4	3.0 2-4	2.7 1-4	2.0 1-4	3.2 1-5	102 16-324	6.3 3-10
Dianthus 'Radiant White' (FG)	5.4 1-10	12.5 6-18	2.4 1-4	2.1 1-4	2.8 1-4	2.4 1-5	3.9 2-5	117 16-324	6.0 3-10
Dianthus 'Radiant White With Ring' (FG)	5.3 1-13	12.7 7-20	2.8 2-4	2.8 2-4	2.5 1-4	2.2 1-4	3.6 2-5	106 16-288	7.8 5-10
Dianthus 'Sweet Exp. Scarlet' (PA)	6.8 1-12	13.9 10-19	4.0 4	3.2 1-5	3.4 3-4	3.4 1-5	3.9 3-5	101 36-192	8.3 7-10
Dianthus 'Sweet Red' (PA)	8.4 1-12	13.1 6-17	4.0 4	3.9 4-5	3.8 3-5	3.5 1-5	3.8 3-5	105 9-288	6.9 4-10
Helianthus 'Orange King' (FG)	1.0 1	39.7 18-60	3.8 2-5	3.4 1-5	3.8 2-5	3.9 2-5	4.5 3-5	106 36-216	9.7 7-12
Helianthus 'Orange Queen' (FG)	1.1 1-3	42.9 24-60	3.4 1-5	3.0 1-5	3.6 1-5	3.9 1-5	4.1 1-5	144 9-576	9.7 7-11
Helianthus 'Pro Cut Peach' (SS)	1.0 1	40.5 18-48	3.0 2-5	3.9 2-5	3.7 1-5	3.3 1-5	4.4 2-5	106 36-256	8.9 2-14
Helianthus 'Pro Cut Red/Lemon Bicolor' (SS)	1.4 1-7	38.3 22-51	3.6 3-4	3.7 2-5	3.8 1-5	3.7 1-5	4.6 3-5	109 9-256	8.9 7-12
Helianthus 'Pro Cut Yellow Lite' (SS)	1.0 1	40.7 18-60	3.3 2-4	4.0 3-5	3.9 2-5	4.0 1-5	4.4 3-5	138 9-576	8.6 6-11

Figure 1. The first row of data for each cultivar is the average, and the second row is the range of responses. When only one response is listed, either only one person responded for that category or several responded and all gave the same rating. \*Ratings are based on a 1-5 scale, with 5 being the best. Market ratings are based on sales to wholesalers, retailers or final consumers.

early. Transplants put out in May or June are subjected to warm temperatures and long days, causing them to flower fast and short. We have had the best luck starting transplants in late January or early February, hardening them off in late March or early April (remember, we are Zone 7) and planting them in early April (avoiding any frosts, if possible). This schedule provides a period of shorter days and cooler temperatures to build up the plant before flowering begins later in the season.

Why do I bring this up? This year we had three trachelium cultivars in the trials, and one of them was dark purple — 'Lake Louise Purple' (PanAmerican Seed). I loved it, and it performed well for us and a few other trialers. Several trialers have figured this species out — enough so that one trialer wrote that 'Lake Louise Blue' was "My choice for number one new flower of the 18 I trialed this year." Of course, the best way for most of us to avoid the disappointment is to grow them in the greenhouse or cool-season hoop house where temperatures and photoperiod can be controlled.

### Zinnia

Zinnias have become one of the staples of the outdoor cut flower industry — and for good reason. Zinnias are productive for a long period of time, available in many beautiful colors and familiar to the general public. Over the years, we have had a number of great zinnia

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## variety information

cultivars in the trials including Ernst Benary of America's Giants series and American Takii's Sun series.

This year we had two cultivars from Goldsmith Seeds that are new to most cut flower growers — 'Uproar

Rose' and 'Zowie! Yellow Flame'. Both received great reviews and have been nominated for the ASCFG Cut Flower of the Year. 'Uproar Rose' produced large, fully double flowers on long stems. As with most commer-

cial cultivars, plants were somewhat mildew resistant with problems only occurring late in the season for most growers. The uniformity and productivity appealed to many trialers.

The color of 'Zowie! Yellow Flame'

caught everyone's attention — the petals were a bold combination of cherry red at the base, blending into orange and finally tipped with yellow. The flowers were smaller than 'Uproar Rose', Benary's Giants or Takii's Sun and a bit variable in coloring and doubleness, but they were prolifically produced on strong plants. 'Zowie! Yellow Flame' is an updated cut flower version of the charming species *Zinnia haageana* and sure to become a hit with cut flower producers. Both cultivars had an excellent vase life. **GPN**

*Author's Note: A hearty thank you to the evaluators who returned their trial reports and to the companies who supplied such great cultivars. Special thanks to Amanda Muller, Paradise Specialty Cut Flowers, for being the first trialer to return evaluations; Chaz Gill, Betsy Hitt, Carolyn Ramsbotham and Vicki Stamback who participated in both the seed and perennial trials and returned evaluations on all their plants; and Ingram McCall and Diane Mays for taking care of the NC State trials, Ingram McCall for data entry and Tina Krug, Aliya Domell, Brad Holland and Tim Ketchie for assisting with the NC State trials.*

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Seed Trial Ratings									
Cultivar	Yield (stems/plant)	Stem length (inches)	Market appreciation rating*			Repeat again rating*	Ease of cultivation rating*	Average spacing (in./plant)	Average postharvest life
			Whole.	Retail	Consumer				
Lisianthus 'ABC 2-3 Blue' (PA)	3.6	17.1	4.7	3.6	4.0	4.2	3.6	53	11.3
	1-8	10-21	4-5	1-5	1-5	2-5	2-5	16-96	6-14
Lisianthus 'ABC 2-3 Blue Blush' (PA)	2.2	17.3	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	45	11.3
	1-4	12-22	4	4	3-5	3-5	3-5	16-96	10-14
Lisianthus 'ABC 2-3 Blue Rim' (PA)	3.1	16.2	4.0	3.8	4.3	3.9	3.7	61	11.2
	1-6	12-20	4	4-5	3-5	2-5	1-5	16-144	6-14
Lisianthus 'ABC 2-3 Rose' (PA)	2.9	18.6	n/a	5.0	4.6	4.6	4.4	45	11.3
	1-5	12-22	n/a	5	3-5	3-5	3-5	16-96	10-14
Lisianthus 'ABC 2-4 Yellow' (PA)	3.6	16.8	4.0	3.8	3.3	3.5	3.6	64	11.7
	1-8	11-22	4	3-5	3-4	2-5	2-5	16-144	6-14
Lisianthus 'ABC 3-4 Purple' (PA)	1.8	16.2	4.0	4.0	4.4	4.3	3.8	61	12.0
	1-3	11-20	4	4	3-5	3-5	3-5	16-144	10-14
Lisianthus 'ABC 3-4 Rose' (PA)	3.7	18.7	4.0	4.0	4.1	4.0	3.9	86	11.2
	1-8	12-20	4	4	3-5	3-5	3-5	16-192	5-14
Lisianthus 'ABC 3-4 White' (PA)	2.4	15.3	4.0	2.7	3.8	3.0	3.3	72	10.0
	1-3	6-20	4	3-4	3-5	1-5	1-5	16-192	6-10
Trachelium 'Lake Louise Blue' (PA)	7.9	16.1	4.0	3.6	3.7	3.5	3.4	79	11.3
	1-14	9-21	4	3-4	1-5	1-5	1-5	16-144	14
Trachelium 'Lake Louise Purple' (PA)	6.6	12.9	3.0	3.3	3.0	3.1	3.1	98	11.3
	2-17	9-18	1-4	1-4	1-5	1-5	1-5	16-324	6-14
Trachelium 'Lake Louise White' (PA)	5.1	14.1	2.3	2.7	2.5	2.3	2.8	125	11.0
	1-15	8-21	1-3	1-3	1-4	1-4	1-4	16-144	6-14
Zinnia 'Uproar Rose' (GS)	10.4	18.4	4.5	3.6	4.7	4.7	4.6	99	8.3
	5-23	12-30	4-5	2-5	3-5	3-5	3-5	9-288	6-11
Zinnia 'Zowie! Yellow Flame' (GS)	7.6	14.0	4.0	4.0	4.7	4.5	4.4	112	9.3
	1-22	6-20	3-5	3-5	4-5	3-5	3-5	12-288	7-12

Figure 1. The first row of data for each cultivar is the average, and the second row is the range of responses. When only one response is listed, either only one person responded for that category or several responded and all gave the same rating. \*Ratings are based on a 1-5 scale, with 5 being the best. Market ratings are based on sales to wholesalers, retailers or final consumers.

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