

Introducing Early Color at a Low Cost



Growers and retailers can benefit from an early spring color program

By Joli A. Hohenstein

What if you could reach the Holy Grail of spring: early flowering at a price you can sell, produced in space you already have? Pleasant View Gardens (PVG) says you can.

They've trialed and tested scores of varieties with a goal of fast-finishing early spring color you can sell at the same price as your premium annuals and grow in your pansy house — and they've got it, in the collection they introduced this year as Spring Magic.

Stone Cold Color

Pleasant View's new program is really a redux, explains Henry Huntington, president of the Loudon, N.H.-based company. Proven Winners introduced their Spring Magic a few years ago when growers asked for more color earlier. But Pleasant View saw even greater potential. "It's a great idea, a

great concept," he says. "But we knew our customers didn't want to vernalize in a large cell, to have to bulk up varieties to fill out a container — it adds too much cost."

Understanding their customers' dilemma, PVG's Research and Development Department went to work. An extensive search of varieties currently on the market brought in more than 30 different genera and more than 150 different varieties.

"We know our customers couldn't get good returns on early vegetative items," says Huntington. "So we went looking for varieties that are affordable, easy to grow and have good genetics."

Pleasant View Gardens had to be sure the varieties could be produced in a 50-count liner and still be able to fill out a 4½-inch pot or included with multiple plants in a color bowl. They trialed the plants using fall sowing as well as later winter/early spring

sowing. They worked out which varieties needed vernalization. They put these varieties through the proverbial wringer.

“The varieties selected had to have a finish time of four to seven weeks,” says Jessica Boldt, production R&D manager. “That’s a fairly fast turn for going late winter/early spring.”

Just as important, they had to be able to take the cold. What better test than a frigid New Hamp-

shire winter? “These varieties absolutely had to be able to take the cold temperatures earlier,” says Pleasant View Territory Account Manager Andy Aiken. “And on top of that they had to be ready to sell earlier, and in color earlier.”

So how did they make it happen? Each variety got cool conditions, with average temperatures of 50 to 55° F, similar to what your pansy house might get. “We’re trying to make it as easy as we



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can for growers — to be able to grow in the same environment they’ve already got,” Boldt explains.

The key to the program’s success, she says, is that none of the varieties need overwintering by the grower — saving time, money, labor and greenhouse space. “We’ve figured out all the details,” she says. “If the plants need vernalization, we do it all here. These are easy and short crop times.”

Best of all, they’re doing it with what growers already have on hand. “Growers can grow these varieties in a cool house — in their pansy house. They’re affordable to grow — you don’t have to put any heat into it,” says Huntington. “And then you can put them on the market at the same price as your Proven Winners premium annuals.”

Magical Mix

For the upcoming season, the final roster includes 18 tough-tested varieties. “It was so hard to narrow it down,” says Boldt. “Ultimately, we limited it to 18 because we wanted to be able to ship out six count in a box — that way we can ship the whole list to people.”

This year’s Spring Magic collection includes: alyssum ‘River of Gold’, aquilegia ‘Pagoda Blue and White’, aquilegia ‘Pagoda Rose and White’, aquilegia ‘Pagoda White’, arabis ‘Pink Sequins’, armeria ‘Ballerina Red’, armeria ‘Ballerina White’, bellis ‘Polar

Spring Magic Variety Crop Times

Variety	Crop Time
Alyssum 'River of Gold'	6
Aquilegia 'Pagoda Blue and White'	7
Aquilegia 'Pagoda Rose and White'	7
Aquilegia 'Pagoda White'	7
Arabis 'Pink Sequins'	4
Armeria 'Ballerina Red'	6
Armeria 'Ballerina White'	6
Bellis 'Polar Pink'	6
Bellis 'Polar Red'	6
Bellis 'Polar White'	6
Doronicum 'Leonardo Compact'	7
Erysimum 'Citrona Yellow'	5
Erysimum 'Sweet Sorbet'	7
Erysimum 'Winter Joy'	7
Geum 'Cooky'	5
Iberis 'Tahoe Snow White'	7
Linaria 'Enchantment'	4
Myosotis 'Mon Amie Blue'	5

Examine it from every angle, and mix and match all varieties to fill out your early season program with color and variety selection.

"It's an area that everybody's looking at," says Aiken. "We've created a program that works for both the grower and the retailer, and in the space they already have."

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Crops are produced in a 50-cell deep liner in 36 to 10 liner ship weeks. For 4½-inch premium annual and 1-quart container sizes, plant one liner per container. For 12-inch color bowls or hanging baskets, plant five liners per container. Crop time for all container sizes will be four to seven weeks.

The quick crop time and early color aren't the only benefits. For maximum profit, Andy suggests combining the Spring Magic program with some of the best traditional Proven Winners varieties that perform early, such as lobularia 'Snow Princess', petunia 'Supertunia' and calibrachoa Superbells.

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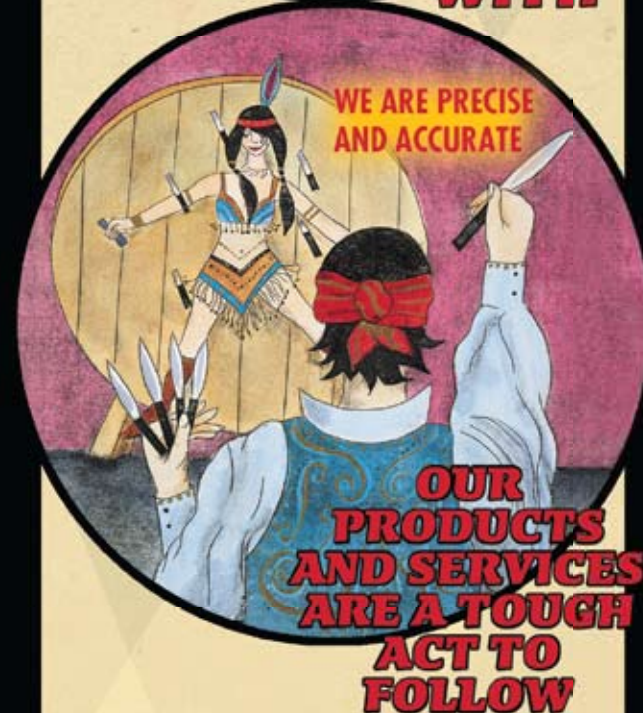
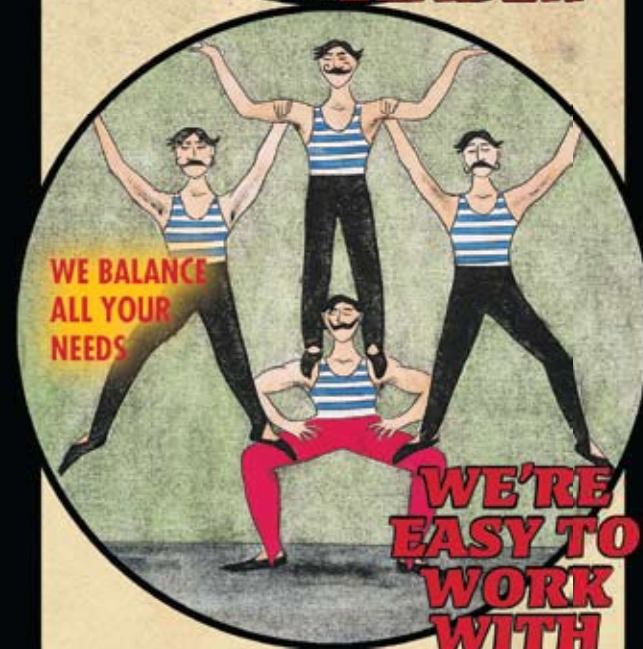
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