



NATIONAL POINSETTIA TRIALS



Top: 'Early White'. Bottom: 'Mars Fire'.



Through the combined support of five poinsettia breeders, one commercial greenhouse and two universities, the 2007 National Poinsettia Trials provided poinsettia growers with independent evaluations of many of the new cultivars introduced each year.

The trial sites would not be possible without the support and cooperation of the many participants and sponsors. The Trials are conducted at two university sites (North Carolina State University and University of Florida) and by Karolina Dworzak and Deke Jackson

at Pleasant View Gardens. Thanks also go to Dümme USA, Ecke Ranch, Fischer USA, Florema and Selecta First Class. We are pleased that Roberto Lopez, a new floriculture faculty member at Purdue University, will be joining the trial program this fall at our northern trial location. Additionally, we would like to thank our dedicated staff, including lead technical staffers Ingram McCall, North Carolina State University, and Carolyn Bartuska, University of Florida.

— John Dole and Jim Barrett

New Releases for 2008

From the classic to the unconventional, new introductions stole the show at the National Trials this year.

By John Dole and Jim Barrett

This was a banner year for new introductions, with 27 new cultivars in the National Trials for the first time. These cultivars should be available in 2008; however, not all new cultivars are listed in the catalogs. Contact your supplier if you see one you want to try that is not listed yet. The descriptions are based on how the cultivars performed in our trials.

Red Cultivars

'Christmas Feelings Select' (Selecta). Unlike many updated versions of established cultivars, the bracts of 'Christmas Feelings Select' look rather different from 'Christmas Feelings'. Select bracts have more points on the edges, while the original cultivar has smooth edges. Both cultivars are medium red with darker-red young bracts that are flat to upright. Branches are sturdy and strongly upright, allowing easy sleeving. The flower clusters are small and the foliage is dark green. Select flowered several days later than the original cultivar.

'Christmas Season' (Selecta). This cultivar has somewhat elongated, narrow bracts that are flat to droopy. Older bracts are medium red with darker-red young bracts.

Centers are large with colorful cyathia. The foliage is dark green, and branching is very good. Plants flowered early, about Nov. 15, and had high vigor.

'Christmas Spirit' (Selecta). These plants had large, medium-red bracts that were somewhat upright. The young bracts were darker red, and the flower clusters were small. Plants flowered mid- to late-season. Growth habit and branching were a little uneven. Plant vigor varied in different trials from low to high.

'Classic Red' (Ecke). These plants have the appearance of some older varieties, thus the name "classic" reflects the style. The inflorescence is large with many long, narrow bracts and very large centers. The color is medium red with darker-red young bracts that were flat to slightly upright. This is a slightly vigorous cultivar with dark-green foliage, and it has good branching. 'Classic Red' is a nice-looking cultivar that is positioned to be important for markets wanting a distinctive larger plant. We will need to see if it can find a niche in that market. Finish timing is midseason, except in Florida trials, where it finished earlier.

'Infinity Bright Red' (Dümme). This slightly different version of

'Infinity Red' appears to be more vigorous than the original cultivar. The bracts are medium red with darker red young bracts. The cyathia clusters are small and the bracts lay flat. Plants flowered mid- to late-season, approximately four days later than 'Infinity Red' at NCSU.

'Mars Fire' (Fischer). A nice cultivar that is virtually indistinguishable from 'Mars Red', except that the former has slightly brighter red bracts with no blue tones. The color difference is best seen in the greenhouse when cloudy. The flat to upright bracts are small, which is characteristic of the series.

'Premium Bright Red' (Dümme). Similar to 'Premium Red', but this cultivar may have better branching. The large, medium-red bracts completely cover the plant in classic Premium style. 'Premium Bright Red' flowered early- to mid-season, about four days earlier than 'Premium Red', at NCSU. This cultivar may need more testing to see whether it is different enough in the United States to be useful.

'Stargazer Red' (Florema). The Stargazers are distinguished by very dark green foliage, among the darkest available. The medium-red bracts are flat to droopy. Plants flowered midseason and were



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medium vigor. Florema cultivars are being promoted as suitable for cold-temperature production. Unfortunately, we had a warm fall and were not able to assess that characteristic.

'Viking' (Dümmen). For this cultivar, the large bracts are medium red with darker-red young bracts. The bracts have a more rounded shape and lay flat. Branching is good and plants are uniform. Plants flowered midseason. Foliage is dark green. Viking is promoted as being good for cool temperature production; unfortunately, we had a warm fall and were unable to assess that characteristic.

White Cultivars

'Classic White' (Ecke). 'Classic White' is well matched in overall appearance to 'Classic Red' with large, creamy-white to slightly yellowish bracts. The foliage is dark green, and the bracts are held flat to slightly upright. The cultivar was one of the darkest whites in the trial this year. At NCSU we finished plants cool, which probably accentuated the yellow cast. Regardless, this plant would be

best used as a companion cultivar to 'Classic Red'.

'Early White' (Fischer). True to its name, 'Early White' was the earliest flowering white cultivar in the trial this year. Not surprisingly the plants were also low vigor. The flat to droopy, creamy-white bracts were somewhat oak-leaf shaped. Leaves were dark green. The cultivar will find a nice niche as an early-flowering white.

'Freedom Early White' (Ecke). Although similar in appearance and growth habit to the other colors in the Freedom Early series, this cultivar flowered later. Plants flowered early but not much more than the original Freedom. The appearance, however, was typical of the Freedom Early series with very large, droopy, creamy-white bracts. The leaves are dark green. Branching and uniformity are good.

'Infinity White' (Dümmen). This cultivar has small, rounded, creamy-white bracts that are held upright. The young bracts have a greenish cast, and the overall appearance of the bracts is more greenish than most other white cultivars. The plants are sturdy with



'Christmas Angel Dark Pink'

uniform branching for easy sleeving and growth habit is similar to 'Infinity Red'. Plants are moderate vigor and flowered late season, but only three days later than 'Infinity Red' at NCSU.

'Premium Polar' (Dümmen). A great replacement for 'Premium White', this cultivar has much brighter white color. The bracts still have a bit of creamy-white cast but have none of the pale-apricot color in the young bracts that shows up in 'Premium White' when the plants are grown cool. The appearance of 'Premium Polar' is similar to the rest of the Premium series with large rounded bracts and

low vigor. Plants flowered early midseason with the rest of the Premium cultivars.

Pink Cultivars

'Christmas Angel Dark Pink' (Selecta). A cultivar in search of a category, this plant has dark pinkish-red bracts that appear light red indoors. The younger bracts are darker. The pink color is, unfortunately, not bright enough to hold its own in the pink category but are not distinctive enough in the red category. The bracts are flat to upright. Plants flowered midseason.

'Classic Pink' (Ecke). As with 'Classic White', 'Classic Pink' is

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'Marco Polo'

also well matched in overall appearance to 'Classic Red'. The large, medium-pink bracts have darker-pink veins and young bracts and the older bracts have less of the gray cast that we see in many other pink cultivars. The foliage is dark green, and the bracts are held flat to slightly upright. This cultivar may find a niche as a stand-alone cultivar but is probably best used as a companion cultivar to 'Classic Red'.

'Estrella Pink' (Florema). 'Estrella Pink' is well matched to 'Estrella Red', flowering within one day of each other and similar in vigor. The bracts are medium pink

with darker-pink veins, and older bracts faded with a slight grayish cast. The small-sized bracts are flat. Plants are well branched with dark-green foliage. This cultivar is probably best used as a companion cultivar to 'Estrella Red'.

'Freedom Early Pink' (Ecke). As with other Freedom Early cultivars, the droopy bracts are strikingly large, with a medium-pink color. The older bracts have a gray cast and the younger bracts are darker pink. The leaves are dark green. This cultivar is well matched to the rest of the series in timing and growth habit. Branching and uniformity were good.

Marble Cultivars

'Freedom Early Marble' (Ecke). This is another addition to the Freedom Early series and has the same very large bracts that hang down or droop. The marble bracts have a light-pink blaze with a very wide creamy white edge. The leaves are dark green. This cultivar is well matched to the rest of the series. Branching and uniformity were good.

'Stargazer Marble' (Florema). This variety has a classic marble pattern with a dark-pink blaze and creamy-white edges. There is excellent contrast between the pink and the white, more so than with some cultivars where the pink is quite pale. The foliage is very dark green, and bract display is flat to slightly droopy. Branching and uniformity were excellent. Plants flowered midseason.

Novelty Cultivars

'Christmas Feelings Apricot' (Selecta). Ruffled apricot to pink peppermint-type bracts distinguish this cultivar. The bracts are flat to droopy, and leaves are dark green. Plants flowered midseason

and are medium vigor.

'Christmas Feelings Crazy' (Selecta). This cultivar has contorted, 'Avantgarde'-type bracts with a dark-pink blaze and creamy-white edges. A number of plants sported to pink or white normal-shaped bracts. The foliage is two-toned dark and gray-green. 'Christmas Feelings Crazy' is less vigorous than 'Avantgarde' with a more compact inflorescence but more vigorous than 'Strawberries and Cream'. It should work well in a variety of pot sizes. The bracts were flat, and plants flowered late season.

'Eggnog' (Ecke). This is a winter rose-type plant with curled leaves and bracts. However, it is a stand-alone cultivar that is not part of either the Winter Rose series or the Early Winter Rose series. 'Eggnog' has large heads of creamy-white bracts and has a better appearance than other white winter rose-type cultivars. The plants are more vigorous, and finish timing is slightly later compared to 'Winter Rose Early Red'. 'Eggnog' branches better than 'Winter Rose Dark Red' and the inflorescences are larger than on any other winter rose cul-

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tivars. Plants are moderate to low vigor with dark-green foliage. Plants flowered midseason.

'Freedom Peppermint' (Ecke). While there is a wide assortment of colors in the Freedom family of cultivars, this is the first peppermint and fills a notable gap. 'Freedom Peppermint' bracts have an apricot-pink color and darker-pink flecks. The bracts are large and droop as with other Freedom cultivars. The leaves are dark green. This cultivar is well matched to the rest of the Freedom series in appearance and timing. 'Freedom Peppermint' may have better branching and stem strength than 'Freedom Red'.

'Marco Polo' (RF 0117) (Dümmen). A distinctive cultivar with dark, apricot-pink and red-flecked bracts, this is possibly the darkest peppermint available. The strongly upright bracts present a very different look. Plants are medium vigor and sturdy, allowing for easy sleeving. The foliage is dark green, and plants flowered midseason.

'Orange Spice' (Ecke). This is the brightest orange-red cultivar available to date, more orange than 'Cortez Electric Fire'. The



Right: 'Eggnog'. Above: 'Classic Red'.

upright bracts are elongated and a bit narrow, such that a fair amount of green shows through. In warm climates, the first bracts have a slightly pale red color, and the true orange color shows with subsequent bract development. The foliage is dark green, and plants are low to moderate vigor.

This is generally an easy cultivar to grow. The question with any novelty is marketing: This color would make it a great Thanksgiving plant, especially well suited for early-season dis-

plays. Some are even looking at it for Halloween. However, it is naturally a late-season cultivar, so the plants would have to be black-clothed for early sales. Despite some rumors and confusion, 'Orange Spice' is not in the Freedom family, does not resemble the appearance or growth habit of Freedom and is not named 'Freedom Orange' in other parts of the world. In heat stress trials, 'Orange Spice' has developed misshapen leaves under the highest temperatures. At NCSU,

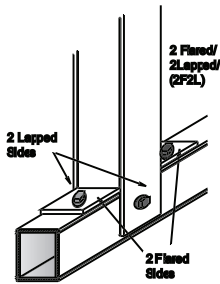
'Orange Spice' looked great when combined with yellow-foliaged plants such as vinca 'Illumination' or crotons. [GPN](#)

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