



NATIONAL POINSETTIA TRIALS



'Christmas Eve'

NEW RELEASES FOR 2009

This year's National Poinsettia Trials saw 25 fresh cultivars, which were put to the test at four different trial locations.

By John Dole, Jim Barrett
and Roberto Lopez

This year, 25 new cultivars were introduced in the National Poinsettia Trials. These cultivars should be available in 2009, but not all new cultivars are listed in the breeders' company catalogs. Contact your supplier if you see one you want to try that isn't listed yet.

The cultivars' descriptions are based on their trial performance at North Carolina State University, Purdue University, University of Florida and Homewood Nursery in Raleigh, N.C.

Red Cultivars

'Castor Red' (Florema). A compact cultivar with dark-red, smooth-edged, flat bracts — the young bracts were even darker — the darkest of any Florema cultivar. Plants flower mid-season and are not very uniform in branching. Plants potted two weeks early were taller but still not very full. Interesting plant with potential if more vigorous and robust. This cultivar was tested only at NCSU and Homewood Nursery.

'Christmas Eve' (Selecta). This cultivar has medium-red bracts and darker-red young bracts. The medium- to large-size bracts are laid flat on the plants, but young bracts are rather tightly clustered in the center of the inflorescence. Cyathia are large with bright-green and yellow colors. Branching is good with uniform growth and upright habit. The variety, which flowers

mid-season and has medium vigor, should be suited for a range of different container sizes.

'Christmas Feelings Merlot' (Selecta). This cultivar joins a growing list of reds with very dark bracts, the color of 'Prestige Maroon' and 'Castor'. As with the other cultivars, the color is rich and lustrous in the greenhouse but tends to be too dark and disappear indoors under fluorescent lights. Plants are moderately vigorous with large bracts that hang down and dark green leaves. Plants flower mid- to late season, three days later than 'Christmas Feelings Red' at NCSU. Plant habit and appearance matches 'Christmas Feelings Red' and the other colors in the series. This cultivar was tested at Florida, NCSU and Homewood.

'Cortez Early Red' (Syngenta). These plants have the general flat across the top and uniform appearance of 'Cortez Red'. The medium-sized bracts lay flat and drop slightly. Color is medium red with darker-red young bracts, with good branching and uniformity among plants. Flowering is early- to mid-season, and plants are moderately vigorous, similar to 'Cortez Red'.

'Flame' (Dümmen). This variety has very large bracts that hang down. Color is a distinctively light orange-red that shows well under fluorescent lights. However, the color contrast with other reds in the greenhouse is not as great. Plants are mostly uniform, except for some dominant

shoots. Branching was very good, with a generally upright habit. Plant vigor varied among trial sites, from compact in Indiana and North Carolina to high in Florida. Flowering was very late at NCSU, not reaching anthesis by Dec. 15. However, plants showed color by early October and were readily marketable mid-season, so this cultivar may be one that does not always show pollen.

'Late Season Red' (Syngenta). This cultivar is vigorous, which is increasingly rare as the industry has moved toward more compact cultivars. It is also late finishing and reached anthesis about Dec. 6 or later. The medium-red, medium-size bracts are darker red when young. Bracts are smooth and lay down to present a flat appearance. Branching is very good, but it is not an upright variety. Stem breakage was reported at Purdue. Try this variety in large pots for December sales.

'Mars 2009' (Syngenta). This variety is similar to 'Mars Red' in appearance and growth habit. The plants are upright and moderately vigorous. Bracts are smaller than average and uniform in appearance. Growers already using Mars will want to take a closer look: 'Mars 2009' may be an important upgrade over 'Mars Red' thanks to its brighter-red color. This cultivar was tested only in Florida.

'Mercurius Red' (Florema). This cultivar has medium-red, medium-sized bracts and dark-



'Christmas Feelings Merlot'



'Cortez Red'



'Mars 2009'



'SK 62'



'Christmas Angel White'



'Polar Bear'



'Christmas Angel Pink'



'Christmas Angel Marble'

green leaves. Plants branch well, but some have a dominant shoot. Plants have medium vigor and flower mid-season. Attractive, but not a notable cultivar. This cultivar was tested only at NCSU and Homewood.

'Mira Red' (Syngenta). These plants had large, medium-red bracts. Larger, older bracts hung down with an oak-leaf shape, and newer bracts were held up and slightly ruffled. Plants are medium vigor with good branching and dark green leaves. Centers are large with a large number of cyathia. While this is a nice cultivar, it is not particularly distinctive. Plants flower early- to mid-season.

'Saturnus Red' (Florema). This plant has medium-red, medium-sized bracts that are held flat. The younger bracts are dark red with leaves that turn dark green. This is one of the nicer Florema cultivars with uniform branching and good presentation. Plants flower mid-season and have medium vigor. This cultivar can also be cold finished. In Purdue's cold-finish study, it performed well when temperatures were lowered to 68° F days/57° F nights two weeks after the start of short days. This cultivar was tested at Purdue, NCSU and Homewood.

'SK 62' (Selecta). These bracts are medium to dark red and medium size. Bract clusters are tight around the flowers but do not appear cramped. There are a relatively small number of cyathia. Bracts are flat with smooth edges. This cultivar has medium vigor and flowers mid- to late season. Branching is uniform with a good upright habit and strong stems. If this variety becomes important, it will be because of its stem strength.

White Cultivars

'Christmas Angel White' (Selecta). This vigorous variety has strong stems and an upright habit that is similar to 'Christmas Angel Red'. The bracts that lay flat are narrow and elongated, as are those of other colors in the series. The young upright bracts are tightly clustered around the cyathia. Unfortunately, bract color is not good — like other dark-leaf varieties — and is an indistinctive creamy white. This cultivar may flower earlier than others in the series.

'Early White' (Syngenta). The medium to large bracts are almost oak-leaf shaped and quite pointed, appearing creamy white under

fluorescent light and white in the greenhouse. While plants had good branching, the stems were thin, and plants benefited from rings. The foliage is dark green and the bracts are droopy. Plants are medium vigor and, true to their name, flower early.

'Infinity Polar' (Dümmen). Large, bright, greenish-white bracts characterize this cultivar. The bracts start out upright with older bracts hanging down more. The foliage is dark green. Plants are medium vigor — but lower vigor than 'Infinity Red' — and flower mid-season, about half a week behind Infinity Red.

'Polar Bear' (Ecke). The bracts are a bright white with bright-green-veined transition bracts. Under both fluorescent and natural lighting, the bracts appear pure white. Bract size is smaller than average and the green in the transition bracts shows. Plants are more upright than 'Whitestar' but less vigorous with stronger stems than 'Snowcap'. A portion of the revenue from this variety goes to a polar bear conservation fund, a story retailers could use to market it.

Pink Cultivars

'Christmas Angel Pink' (Selecta). This cultivar fits the general growth habit and appearance of other colors in the series. The bright-pink bract color is good compared to most dark-leaf cultivars, but the color does fade as bracts age. The young bracts are dark pink. The transition bracts have an interesting and prominent green edge. Branching is uniform with an upright habit. Plants are moderately vigorous and flower mid-season, a couple of days earlier than 'Christmas Angel Red'.

Marble Cultivars

'Christmas Angel Marble' (Selecta). This cultivar has great contrast between the dark-pink blaze and the creamy white edge, but the pink fades on the older bracts. Plants are medium to high vigor with both elongated and oak-leaf-shaped dark leaves and good branching. Flowering is mid-season, flowering at the same time as 'Christmas Angel Red'. This is a good companion plant for 'Christmas Angel Red' but may also be strong enough to stand alone.

'Infinity Marble' (Dümmen). The color pattern is mostly light to medium pink with a

narrow, creamy-white edge. The large flat bracts are slightly droopy and foliage is dark green. The transition bracts are speckled green at the outer edges. Plants are less vigorous than 'Infinity Red' and flowering is late, up to nine days later than 'Infinity Red' at NCSU. Bract color is not distinctive, and this cultivar is best viewed as a companion color to 'Infinity Red'.

'Winter Blush' (Ecke). This cultivar has large bracts with a medium pink blaze and a wide creamy white border — 'Winter Blush' is a good name. The pink fades a bit on the older bracts. The plants had very good, uniform branching, with dark green leaves. The bracts are flat and smooth. Larger, older bracts tend to hang down some. Plants have low to moderate vigor. An extra week or two would be good for 6½-inch or larger pots. Flowering is mid-season. This has good potential as a standalone novelty; however, most consumers seem to still prefer the appearance of 'Marblestar'.

Novelty Cultivars

'Christmas Curl' (University of Connecticut). This vigorous cultivar has rosy red bracts, each one with a twist or two. The center of each bract has a darker blaze. Bracts are intermediate between those of 'Carousel' and typical flat-bracted cultivars. The foliage is dark green, but leaves are small, giving an open (sparse) appearance. While this is an interesting cultivar, the color may be problematic as it is too dark to be considered pink and may be considered a light red, especially under fluorescent lights. Also, it did not readily respond to plant growth regulators, limiting production to larger pots with support for the thin stems. Plants flowered mid-season.

'Christmas Feelings Cinnamon' (Selecta). The golden cinnamon bracts are flecked with dark pink. The bract color is lighter than 'Da Vinci' and similar to 'Cinnamon Star'. Color pattern was relatively uniform compared to other cultivars in the peppermint/cinnamon class. The flat bracts are slightly elongated and foliage dark green. The branching is uniform. Plant vigor in some trials was lower than that of the other Christmas Feelings colors and flowering was mid- to late season, five days behind 'Christmas Feelings Red' at NCSU. ▀



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NATIONAL POINSETTIA TRIALS



'Winter Blush'



'Christmas Curl'



'Christmas Feelings Cinnamon'



'Cinnamon Stick'

'Cinnamon Stick' (University of Connecticut). Cinnamon Stick has the darkest peppermint-type bracts of any current cultivar. The strongly upright bracts, similar to those of Jester, are cinnamon yellow with pink flecks. The bracts were almost oak-leaf shaped. Sturdy plants are compact and uniform; two weeks more would be needed for 6½-inch pots. Leaves are dark green and flowering is mid-season. This cultivar may not be attractive in a greenhouse setting, but it's very distinctive when used with gold/bronze decorations.

'Picasso Punch' (Dümmen). This unique cultivar is a derivation of the popular 'Premium Picasso' with a dark, rosy-pink blaze in the middle of each bract in addition to the blush edge. Typical of Premium, the smooth bracts are large and hang down, with large, dark-green foliage. The plants are compact and have a similar growth habit and vigor to 'Premium Red'. Flowering is early to mid-season.

'Pink Candy' (Selecta). A peppermint type with dark-pink bracts

and tiny, darker-pink flecks. Coloration is generally brighter than other peppermint cultivars, but color does darken as plants age. Bracts are medium sized and a bit elongated. Plants, which flower mid-season, had good branching, and vigor varied from low in the North to higher in the South. Very nice cultivar, which shows well under fluorescent lights and in the greenhouse. **GPN**

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