

The Evolution of Plant Trials

Who doesn't love to walk through a retail garden center and ogle all of the new plants that have made it to market each year? Every plant nerd I know does! Many ask how and why certain varieties make it to market and others don't. The process of trialing is how.

Plant trialing has been around for years. Organizations such as The University of Georgia have been trialing plants since 1982 as well as the Dallas Arboretum who has been trialing plants since 1998.

Until now it has been mainly the work of universities and botanical gardens around the nation carrying the load. Times are changing and more and more growers have taken on the responsibility of trialing new genetics before shipping them off to market.

Plant trialing is not only an integral part of the green industry but it's important for the consumer. Testing plants in varying parts of the country allows the breeders to make better decisions about what will look good and grow in the landscape and also allows the growers to decide what works best for their business and their cultural practices.

Every region has its own issues with disease and pest pressures, water management issues, as well as heat and/or cold temperatures.

Growing different varieties of the same genus side by side allows the grower to truly see what hybrid performs best in their area. For example, in the Pacific Northwest our biggest challenge is finding plants that can grow in wet soils and low light.

While other places like Dallas, Texas, are looking for plants that can handle harsher weather conditions like day and night temperatures above 95° F for extended periods of time with long drought periods. Not only is the climate an important factor but basic overall beauty of the plant is a necessity.

As the trialing community continues to grow nationally, I see the depth of information growing as well. Organizations such as the National Plant Trials Database and the All-America Selections group have worked to standardize trialing formats and procedures as well as compile information from multiple trial sites around the nation. Thereby helping breeders, growers, landscapers, designers



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and garden centers get a quick view into how these new genetics are working regionally.

For the past 11 years I have been fortunate to be a part of the trialing community and have it be my "job." I have witnessed the start of thousands of different new varieties that never made it to market.

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Seeing directly how trials can affect consumer shopping habits as well as helping steer a grower's decision on what to produce never ceases to amaze me. It all starts and ends with trialing.

Trialing shapes the market and as more and more growers begin to incorporate trials into their everyday practice we will see an evolution of products that are best suited for each individual climate throughout the country. So go out and see what's new and cultivate your future! [gpn](#)



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