

Making New Variety Decisions

In the early 2000s, two psychologists set up an experiment at an upscale grocery store. On the first day, they set up a table with a large display of jars of jam with over 100 different varieties.

They included a taste test and a coupon for a discount to make a purchase that day. The second day they limited the display to only the top six best varieties. Sales were higher on the second day with fewer choices than the first day with many! Customers experienced a phenomenon known as “choice paralysis” — too many choices led to indecision and inaction. Since this experiment, countless other studies have shown that more choice does not always lead to increased sales volume or customer satisfaction. In short: Less is more.

In our industry, we are faced with a multitude of choices each year — from breeder product launches to picking the correct pot size and color. Each variety launched is labeled as the “best” and a “must have.” With a never-ending array of variety choice, how do we choose the best varieties to increase revenue and drive the greatest customer satisfaction?

MAKE A PLAN

Each year at Darwin Perennials, we evaluate hundreds of breeder codes. To whittle down the options and make the best choices, we’ve developed a set of criteria to help us make the best decisions when we launch new products.

1. Can we produce a potential new variety reliably? Does the new variety fit into our existing supply chain?
2. Will a grower or young plant producer be able to propagate successfully?
3. Does a new variety perform for the consumer in their landscape? Will it overwinter? What does it look like in spring, summer and fall?
4. What will it look like in a pot at retail? Will the plant last at retail? Does it fill out a pot? Does the variety have potential for retail appeal?
5. Is there an existing variety a new variety replaces or a specific trait it improves upon?

If potential varieties do not meet the above standards, we move on to the next variety. What criteria do you use to decide what to grow and offer to your customers? Developing a plan and a set of standard criteria in advance of variety decisions bring focus and clarity to your product offering.

TRIAL, TRIAL, TRIAL

Part of any variety choice decision should include regional performance. I am a big supporter of third-party, non-biased trial locations like the University of Georgia or Colorado State University. These trial sites provide data, photography and “best of” lists to showcase outstanding regional performance. Also,

many breeders offer new introduction trials. Take advantage of these opportunities to see the results for yourself.

MY TOP 5

Any article on choice would not be complete without highlighting my Top 5 perennial selections and personal favorites for the upcoming retail season:

1. **Lavender ‘Primavera’.** This unique Spanish lavender needs no chill to flower and will bloom throughout the spring and summer. It can also be programmed for very early flowering markets as the first Spanish lavender in bloom.
2. **Salvia ‘Rose Marvel’.** With the largest flowers of any rose or pink *Salvia nemorosa*, the deep rose color stands out in the landscape. As a Zone 4, first-year flowering perennial, ‘Rose Marvel’ can be programmed to fit into any grower’s program.
3. **Digitalis ‘Arctic Fox Rose’.** Overwinters in the harshest Midwest winters up to a Zone 5. It is also a true perennial and will flower year after year in the garden.
4. **Nepeta ‘Blue Prelude’.** For the grower looking to add something truly unique to their offering, ‘Blue Prelude’ is an excellent choice. During the first year, ‘Blue Prelude’ stays nice and compact, but second year will scale up to three feet in the landscape!
5. **Salvia ‘Blue By You’.** Or, as many growers are calling it, “May Night Improved”, flowers at least two weeks before ‘May Night’. It will also re-bloom quicker than ‘May Night’ and is much easier to propagate and finish.

The number of variety choices and options will only continue to grow in the years to come. How will you make the best decisions for your customers? [gpn](#)



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