

Marketing Perennials in the Southeast

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Perennials are becoming more popular additions to the American garden. Part of the difficulty producers and retailers have in marketing perennials is a lack of information on production and purchasing. The USDA reports perennial plant production only once every decade. Perennial plant production was reported to be \$21 million in 1987 (USDA, 1988). Wholesale bedding plant production was valued at \$681 million in 1987 (USDA, 1988). Perennials would have accounted for only 3% of the total herbaceous plant market. This article compares the perennial marketing of Southern growers to that of growers throughout the rest of the United States.

The 1992 and 1993 Professional Plant Growers' Association (PPGA) & Greenhouse Manager Magazine Season Sales Summaries were conducted by Auburn University researchers. These studies collected information on herbaceous plant production across the United States. We mailed two survey forms to 1400 PPGA members in June and July of 1992 and 1993. Response rates were 21% and 22% respectively. Respondents were divided into two categories, the Southern region and the remainder of the United States. There were 42 and 47 growers from the Southern region in 1992 and 1993 respectively. Their responses were compared to 251 and 258 producers from the rest of the country. Questions focused on (1) the percentage of total perennial sales accounted for by each crop listed, (2) planned changes in production, (3) rating the sales of the crop [in 1993 only], and (4) perennial sales information. Specific perennials were listed on the form: *Achillea*, *Aquilegia*, *Chrysanthemum*, *Dianthus*, *Hemerocallis*, *Hosta*, *Ornamental grasses*, *Phlox*, *Primula* and *Salvia*.

Results and Discussion

In 1992, we saw that *Chrysanthemum*, *Hosta* and *Hemerocallis* were the species that accounted for the largest percentage of production (Table 1). In 1993, Southern producers grew a lower percentage of *Primula* and a higher percentage of *Salvia* when compared to growers throughout the rest of the country. Most crops, other than *Chrysanthemum*, accounted for only small percentages of the total crop.

TABLE 1. Comparison of Southern region and other growers on the percentage of total perennial plant production accounted for 10 listed perennials.

CROP	PERCENT OF 1993 PRODUCTION	
	South	Other
<i>Achillea</i>	3.1	2.8
<i>Aquilegia</i>	3.8	3.6
<i>Chrysanthemum</i>	30.5	12.8
<i>Dianthus</i>	7.1	4.3
<i>Hemerocallis</i>	6.8	4.1
<i>Hosta</i>	7.6	9.6
<i>Ornamental grasses</i>	3.6	3.4
<i>Phlox</i>	4.8	4.3
<i>Primula</i>	0.4	5.4
<i>Salvia</i>	6.9	2.6

We asked growers to report if they were planning increases next year in the number of units of each type of perennial they grew. A smaller percentage of Southern growers planned increases in *Aquilegia*, *Hemerocallis*, and *Primula* than other growers did. In 1993, fewer Southern growers planned increases in *Aquilegia*. Most categories of perennial plants were expanding at similar rates for all growers.

In 1993, we asked growers to report their perceptions on the sales trends for the 10 perennial crops listed. Ratings were made on a scale from 5 = excellent sales to 1 = poor sales (Table 2). Crops received an average rating between 2.3 (*Primula*) and 3.2 (*Hosta*). Only one difference was observed: Southern producers rated the sales of *Salvia* higher than did growers throughout the rest of the United States.

Finally, growers were asked to report total firm sales and total perennial sales. Averages were calculated for the percentage of the total crop accounted for by perennial plants and the average dollar of perennial plant sales. No differences were detected. Southern producers grew perennials for an average wholesale value of \$59,993 in 1992 and \$65,876 in 1993.


Growers throughout the rest of the country grew an average \$59,333 and \$66,311 in 1992 and 1993 respectively. In the South, perennials accounted for 11% of total plant sales in 1992 and 9% in 1993. For growers in the rest of the country, perennial sales accounted for 18% and 9% of production in 1992 and 1993.

TABLE 2. Comparison of Southern region and other growers on the rating of the sales trends for 10 listed perennials.

Crop	Average Rating ¹ 1993	
	South	Other
<i>Achillea</i>	2.6	2.4
<i>Aquilegia</i>	3.0	2.9
<i>Chrysanthemum</i>	3.0	2.9
<i>Dianthus</i>	2.9	2.8
<i>Hemerocallis</i>	2.9	2.8
<i>Hosta</i>	3.2	3.1
<i>Ornamental grasses</i>	2.2	2.3
<i>Phlox</i>	2.7	2.6
<i>Primula</i>	2.3	2.6
<i>Salvia</i>	3.0	2.5

¹Rating scale of 5 = excellent sales to 1 = poor sales.

Significance to the Industry

Perennial plants accounted for a significant portion of herbaceous plant production. The percentage is probably higher than the 3% calculated from government statistics. The percentage of specific plants grown does vary by region of the country. *Aquilegia* and *Primula* accounted for a greater percentage of the crop for producers located outside the Southern region. *Salvia* accounted for a higher percentage of perennial plant sales in the Southern region. Producers' ratings of sales trends for these crops were similar, except for *Salvia*, which received a better sales rating in the South. The mix of crops varied, but the average wholesale value of perennial plant sales and the percentage of total firm sales accounted for by perennials did not vary by region of the country. 

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