

SPECIALTY ANNUALS

by Allan Armitage, University of Georgia, Athens, GA

Persian Shield (*Strobilanthes dyerianus*)

<i>Strobilanthes</i> (strobe-I-lan' thes)	Persian Shield	Acanthaceae
Purple/silvering leaves	Burma	3-5'3"

Introduction

In the quest for color in the landscape and the retail shop, some of the brighter landscapers and retailers realized a number of years ago that not only do colorful flowers sell, so does colorful foliage. Some market people feel that color is color and as long as the container catches the eye of the shopper and the gardener, then arguing about the source of the color is an futile exercise. Others feel that the only useful color is flower color. Such short-sighted people are still in the "marigold mold" of color, and are not keeping up with trends in the real world. The importance of foliage color is seen in the breeding of begonias, New Guinea impatiens and the major increase in sales of coleus. Persian Shield is an old fashioned plant and has not changed a great deal since Victorian times. However, it's large purple and silver leaves are terrific in bold landscapes or small gardens.

What to know about this plant:

Basic Marketing Strategies (for salespeople)

Pros and Cons of *Strobilanthes*

Pros: An excellent performer in most of the country. Grows rapidly once summer temperatures arrive. Leaf color stable and consistent, not affected by temperature. A useful filler in landscapes and gardens. No particular disease or insect problems I am aware of. Very little problem with deer or rabbits.

Cons: No flowers are produced, therefore some people find it less exciting. Not recommended for finishing in cell packs, more room required for 6" or one gallon containers.

Use In the Landscape and Garden:

The plant has been grown long enough to know what it will do. It is sufficiently large to use as a specimen but provides excellent contrast to many other crops and can be used like the gray-leaved Dusty Miller and Artemisia. Plants can be cut back or trimmed if they get too big, resulting in greater girth as they mature. They are a little slow to start but as the weather warms up, they grow rapidly. Heat tolerance is excellent and drought tolerance is above average, however in dry times, irrigation is useful to reduce the appearance of wilting. They are not small plants, topping out at about 5' under positive conditions, and about 3' with a single pinch. However, they require no staking. Plants are useful for landscape/garden beds as well as for containers, but inappropriate for baskets.

Basic Production Strategies (for growers):

Propagation: Vegetatively, from tip cuttings only. Tip cuttings should have root hormone applied and placed in a well-drained rooting medium with 72-75°F bottom heat. Rooting will occur in 7-10 days with bottom heat, in about 2 weeks without it. Can be direct stuck or transplanted to final containers in 3-4 weeks.

Growing-on: Provide as much sunlight as possible. Clean bays where plants are to be grown. Supplemental lighting is useful to enhance branching, but not necessary in most areas of the country. Plant growth will be delayed at temperatures below 55°F, but cool temperatures may be useful to slow down crop if necessary. Plant growth will be delayed but not damaged if temperatures dip below 50°. Day temperatures of 70-75°F day temperatures are recommended, night temperatures of 70-75°F are recommended. A single pinch enhances branching and is recommended, a double pinch fills them out even more and maintains a useful height, regardless of container size. They can be grown in a 4" container, but not recommended. If 4" is the container of choice, double pinch so short plants can be maintained. Plants will finish in 6-10 weeks, depending on the container size.

No particular nutritional needs. Plants seldom require growth regulation, however, if they are lanky, a single application (1000 ppm Cycocel, 3500 ppm B-Nine, 1 ppm Bonzi) could be applied about 2 weeks after the first pinch. Cool temperatures will reduce the need for GRs but also slow down crop time.

Schedule: (guidelines only)

For April 15 sales (South):

Feb 1	Feb 15	March 1	March 15	April 15
Root cuttings	Transplant to final cont.	Pinch	Second pinch (opt)	Sell

For May 15 sales (North):

Feb 15	Mar 1	March 15	April 10	May 15
Root	Transplant to final cont.	Pinch	Second pinch (opt)	Sell

Cultivars:

No cultivars I am aware of

Availability:

From plant distributors.

Basic Retail Strategies (for the final customer)

Plant in full sun. They need to be placed in well-drained soils for best performance, but otherwise are trouble free. Pinch if necessary to restrain growth. Only one plant is needed for a dozen companion plants, however if a large planting is desired by a gardener or landscaper, 18" to 2' centers may be recommended. They work in garden situations but also do wonderfully well in large patio containers where the growth is restricted. That deer don't find them particularly appealing is a great selling point. According to Denise Schreiber at the Department of Parks in Pittsburgh, *Strobilanthes* is not bothered by hedgehogs either. Terrific center plants for containers.

They associate well with silver plants such as dusty miller, lamb's ears or silver plectranthus. They also do well with those plants with

(continued on next page)

purple or red in the flowers or foliage which reflect the colors of the Persian Shield leaves. Sandy Feather, the consumer horticulture agent in Alleghany County noted that they were outstanding with 'Purple Wave' petunias. First frost, however, results in blackened goo.

Acknowledgement: Many thanks to Denise Schreiber of the Alleghany County Parks Department for her help with this article

Portulaca

Portulaca (por-tue-la' ca)	Purslane	Portulacaceae
Many colors	Cosmopolitan	6-9"/24"

This is a terrific genus, probably best known however, for the crummy common purslane weed in my walkway and lawn. However, if any breeders can be put on a pedestal for improving a weed, then the improvers of portulaca and purslane should go to the head of the class. The breeders of portulaca, botanically known as *P. grandiflora*, have done an exceptional job, with Bodger's Sundial series probably the best of the bunch. However, the "sleeper" that emerged from nowhere just a couple of years ago is purslane, botanically a different species of the same genus, *P. oleracea*. I am impressed with portulaca but I am a true believer in purslane. In wet dull summers, purslane is landscape-tougher than portulaca. The good portulacas are mostly seed-propagated, however, purslane is only vegetatively propagated. They both work in cell packs (portulaca does a little better in cell packs), 4 and 6" pots and hanging baskets. Purslane has 2-3" wide single flowers in a half dozen colors.

Pros and Cons of Purslane, *P. oleracea*

Pros: Extraordinarily heat tolerant, flowers are formed throughout the season once temperatures are above 65°F. Easy to grow in the greenhouse, spread well in any sunny, well-drained landscape. The large colorful flowers are excellent for impulse sales.

Cons: In the greenhouse, plants require more heat than petunias to grow (although no more than vinca), plants need good light for flowers to open. Susceptible to spider mites in the greenhouse. In the landscape, the two problems are (a) flowers don't open under dull conditions and conversely close in early afternoon, and (b) plants do not tolerate wet conditions particularly well.

In the Landscape and Garden: Plants perform well in full sun and poorly in shade. They can be used as a groundcover because they grow to about 6" tall and up to 2' wide. Performance has been excellent from Salinas to Chicago and even better in Athens and Raleigh. They are also highly useful for hanging baskets and patio containers. Plants are more widely used in the South than in the North, but are useful plants anywhere summer temperatures remain above 70°F for any length of time.

Basic Production Strategies

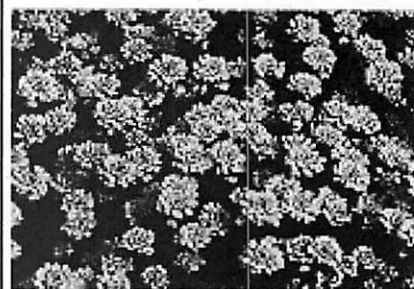
Propagation: Always from cuttings. The Yubi series is trademarked and cultivars may not be propagated under the Yubi name but may be purchased in plugs. Varieties not protected (generally under color names like yellow or pink, etc) can be propagated by 3-4 node cuttings under bottom heat and in a sweat tent. Given 70°-75°F soil temperatures, cuttings should root in 7-10 days.

Growing-on: Use a single plug or cutting per 4" pot, 2-3 per 6" pot, 4-6 plugs per 10" basket. Growing-on temperatures should not fall below 65F, 70°-75°F day temperatures work well. No pinching is necessary although if plants get leggy, branches may be pinched without damage. Finished plants will bud up in 2 to 6 weeks, depending on container sizes, flowers occur 5 days after visible bud.

High light is needed for best quality and most rapid turnover. Supplemental lighting is useful in the North but is not necessary. Under high light conditions pinching definitely results in better branching.

(Continued on page 47)

The Horticultural Web



Green Leaf's Iberis sempervirens

A Dynamic Internet Community to:

- ♦ find resources, information, news, ideas
- ♦ locate suppliers and buyers
- ♦ advertise and promote your web presence
- ♦ review or promote products or plant availability
- ♦ attend virtual trade shows -- register for the real thing
- ♦ create your own hort-related home page
- ♦ chat with colleagues
- ♦ uncover life-long-learning launch points
- ♦ enjoy our weekly Hort Tour
- ♦ shop in our secure-transaction store

Brought to you exclusively on the World Wide Web at the address you can grow to remember.....

www.horticulture.com



1.800.WWW.6WEB

No particular nutritional needs. A well-balanced N-P-K (eg 20-10-20) is all that is needed; provide about 100 ppm N CLF or a slow release fertilizer if soluble feed is not used. No growth regulators are required.

Schedule for 8-10" basket:

For May 1 (north):

Plant plugs	Flower buds	Flowers
March 10	Apr 25	May 1

For April 1 (south):

Plant plugs	Flower buds	Flowers
Feb 15	Mar 25	Apr 1

4-6" containers can be finished in 3-4 weeks from transplanting plugs, cell packs take approximately 2-3 weeks, depending on density.

Cultivars:

A number of "older" varieties were kicking around from specialty propagators for many years and are still available. Yellow, pink, rose and salmon colors are occasionally seen. There is nothing wrong with these varieties although the improved cultivars are truly improved.

Yubi series have been receiving high grades for landscape and greenhouse performance for about 3 years. I trailed it against some of the older varieties and was able to say good things in the Georgia trials and in various lectures on vegetative annuals. I was not the only one, 'Yubi Apricot' was selected a Florastar winner and the Yubis have also received accolades from the Texas award program. Colors include Apricot, Light Pink, Red, Rose, Scarlet and Yellow.

Basic Retail Strategies

In the garden, have customers plant Purslane in full sun, away from low areas. They may be placed in the front of the garden or even act as an edger material. In large patio containers, they comport well with pendulous *Setcrasia* and petunias or upright *Strobilanthes* and *Osteospermum*. In baskets, customers should be reminded that although they are drought tolerant, plants require a good soaking every 2-3 days during the summer. If plants get leggy, they may be cut back to about 1/2 their length. They also must be reminded that flowers will not open well in dull weather and often close before they get home from work. You may not want to remind them too much about this unfortunate fact, however, it is true. The Yubis tend to stay open longer and under duller weather than the "older" types.



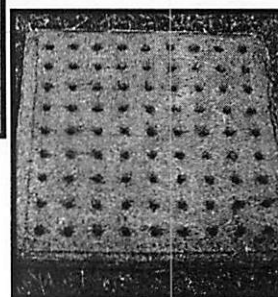
RoLanka
International, Inc.

"Coconut Fiber Specialists"

365 Toccoa Place, Jonesboro, GA 30236

The Best Source for Quality Coir (Coconut Fiber) Horticultural Products

- ☼ *Compacted coir dust (bricks & blocks)*
- ☼ *Coir basket liners (different diameters and bulk rolls)*
- ☼ *Coir poles*
- ☼ *Coir twine*
- ☼ *Coir growth plates (Patent pending)*
- ☼ *Coir growth rolls (Patent pending)*
- ☼ *Coconut husk chips*
- ☼ *Cut coconut fiber*



Call for Information:

1-800-760-3215

Tel: (770) 506 8211

Fax: (770) 506 0391

Available in smaller quantities for immediate delivery or pick up from Atlanta, GA. **Call toll-free 1 800 760 3215 to place your order.**