

New Ornamental Crops for the U.S. Floral Industry

Three species of houseplants, a dwarf lisianthus, an evergreen of the cypress family from Holland, and a Jerusalem cherry from Denmark will be ready to be introduced to U.S. consumers next year, a USDA scientist announced recently.

"We expect these plants to have a favorable impact on the floral industry. They are totally new plants for the American market," said *Roger H. Lawson* of the USDA's Agr. Res. Service. He heads the agency's Florist & Nursery Crops Lab. in Beltsville, MD, which bred the new plants.

He said the plants were released to the florist and nursery industries and to university specialists, which evaluated the plants for 3 to 5 years in repeated growings as part of a new crops program the agency and the industry established in 1984.

Lawson said the goal of the new crops program is to search for, test, and introduce new plants that have market potential for the floral and nursery industries. "We transfer the results of our research to industry, and it evaluates whether a plant has sales appeal to the public," he said.

Horticulturist *Mark Roh*, who is in charge of the new crops program at the Beltsville lab., said the dwarf lisianthus may be the first of the plants to be available to consumers next spring. He summarized the 3 plants:

Dwarf Lisianthus—It reaches a maximum height of 10 in., has a single stem, some lateral branching, and smooth leaves. Flowers of the new dwarf selection are purplish-blue. Roh is working on white and pink

specimens for later introduction. Blooms are hardy and can last at least 14 days as a cut flower—longer than usual for cut flowers. It needs plenty of light but little other care except for watering every 2 to 3 days. Outdoors, it can be used as a bedding plant and will bloom for up to 2 months.

Gold Crest—This cultivar of cupressus, an evergreen native to Holland, is about 1½ ft. tall. Gold Crest makes an ideal plant for the holidays. It is fragrant and can be pruned by snipping off excess growth with the fingers. Plants can be grown in pots on the window sill in high or low light. They require water every 3 days. Office machines or heating vents that generate lots of warm air may harm the plants.

Jerusalem cherry—This plant grows to about a foot. Its variegated green leaves and bright orange-red berries make it a popular plant in its native Denmark. With plenty of light and water every other day, the Jerusalem cherry makes a good house plant for about 2 or 3 months. It can be replanted outside where it will bear berries in early summer and last until the first frost.