

NEW POINSETTIA VARIETIES ¹

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Recently, interest in poinsettias has been stimulated by the introduction of numerous varieties with greatly improved keeping quality. Jim Mikkelsen introduced Paul Mikkelsen and its subsequent sports. Robert N. Stewart of USDA has released a group of new varieties. These introductions and some unnamed varieties from Stewart's program have been grown in the University of Minnesota horticulture greenhouses.

The purpose of this article is to present impressions of these varieties and a few of the Ecke varieties. The comments will be supplemented by information from Rutgers University (1) on the effect of growth regulators on individual varieties.

Mikkelsen Introductions

Paul Mikkelsen. A red, fast rooting, fast growing, stiff stemmed, upright, long lasting variety. Bract size was smaller than that of the Ecke varieties. It did best in good light intensity and should be brought into bloom early and fertilized frequently to obtain maximum bract size. Finishing at high temperatures resulted in pale bract color. Under certain conditions, the bract clusters split and the center florets dropped prematurely. In our greenhouses, the splitting frequently followed lighting of the plants. The originator's instructions for producing the variety should be followed. Response to growth regulators was reported in the June 1, 1966 issue of this bulletin.

Mikkelpink. A pink sport of Paul Mikkelsen with slightly larger bract clusters. Veins on the bracts were slightly darker than the general bract color producing a most attractive pattern. Rutgers reported that this variety responded to both foliar spray and soil drench applications of CCC (Cycocel). It is by far the most attractive and

¹Paper No. 6017. Miscellaneous Journal Series. Agr. Expt. Station, Univ. of Minn.

best of the pink varieties now available.

Mikkeldawn. A bicolored mutation from Mikkelpink with two toned pink areas on cream colored bracts. Only a limited number of plants were grown, but the variety appeared to be quite similar to Paul Mikkelsen in growth and size. Rutgers reported that this variety responded to a soil drench of CCC. It should be placed in a novelty class for sale on occasions other than Christmas. It might prove to be a good item for New Year's Eve.

Mikkelwhite. A cream sport of Mikkeldawn. Very few plants of this variety were observed. Other white and cream varieties appear to be preferable, because they have larger bract clusters than Mikkelwhite. All of the white or cream varieties grown had very good keeping quality.

USDA Introductions

Stoplight (No. 60-447-1). This variety has full, slightly puckered, rich bright red bracts on stiff, upright stems. The red bracts, which averaged 26 per cluster, were sometimes tilted a bit and were attached to the top 3 to 4 inches of the stem, rather than to just the top inch. These features resulted in a very full and deep bract cluster. Diameter of the bract clusters was less than that of Barbara Ecke Supreme and greater than that of Paul Mikkelsen. At the same time, the bracts were flexible enough to permit easy wrapping at Christmas. Mature plants were shorter than Barbara Ecke Supreme and Paul Mikkelsen. Stoplight, like the Mikkelsen varieties, required frequent fertilization for best results.

Some of the bracts of Stoplight developed marginal necrotic areas. Verbal reports indicated that this necrosis was not just a local problem. Therefore, the plants were closely observed under both greenhouse and simulated home conditions. Necrotic tips and edges that developed on greenhouse plants usually were tan in color and developed first on the upper surface. Sometimes a speckled pattern of spots developed first. On plants under home conditions, the markings were primarily purplish or purplish-maroon. In addition, the home plants had more dried bract tips (1/8 to 1/16 inch) that were not especially conspicuous. The number of bracts that developed necrotic areas over a 4-week test period averaged close to 10 percent in both locations, or 17 percent when dried tips were included under home conditions. After the 4-week test period, all plants under home conditions that were watered less frequently than recommended did not have greater incidence of bract necrosis than the others. The plants still were attractive and retained their bracts and leaves quite well. It appears that Stoplight is an exceedingly good and attractive variety for production in Minnesota.

Rutgers reported that foliar sprays of CCC or B-Nine caused splitting of the bract cluster. Soil drenches of CCC, which have been proven effective, are recommended until more information is available.

White Cloud (No. 61-493-1). An attractive, creamy-white variety with large, full bracts on tall, vigorous plants with stiff stems. Bract diameter was similar to that of Stoplight. Ecke White was not grown, so no comparisons could be made between it and White Cloud.

Snowcap (No. 60-534-3). An attractive, true white variety with a medium number of bracts on wiry stems with dark green, deeply notched leaves. Rutgers reported that Snowcap did not show a marked response to growth retardants, but the natural habit was

shorter than most of the other varieties.

Snowflake (No. 60-372-2). Another true white variety with dark green, entire leaves on stiff stems. We rated Snowcap over Snowflake in that Snowflake had narrower (although abundant) bracts, dropped the florets quicker, and was slower rooting late in the season. Rutgers reported that both Snowflake and Ecke White responded well to treatment with B-Nine and CCC. The variety was relatively compact in growth habit.

Spring Pink (No. 61-156-1). This variety had bracts of a most attractive, uniform pink color on stiff, strong plants. We did not grow this variety prior to 1965; many commercial growers also had plants. For some unexplained reason, the bracts were very small and crinkled, giving the appearance of having been overtreated with a growth regulator, even when untreated. Apparently, this response was nationwide. The variety is not worth considering at present.

USDA Trial Varieties

Only promising varieties are discussed.

No. 61-695-4. A rich, coral-pink variety with crinkled bracts that gave the appearance of being diseased. The bract clusters were smaller than those of Mikkelpink. Rutgers reported that this variety did well in their trials. It is possible that altering cultural procedures might improve plant quality in Minnesota.

No. 62-283-1. A very stocky, sturdy plant with many broad, relatively short, ivory bracts. The flowers and the opening in the center of the bract cluster were considerably larger than they were in White Cloud, whereas individual bracts were shorter. Despite the large centers, the plants were very attractive. The question is how many white varieties are needed when red is the primary color sold at Christmas. Year-round sales of poinsettias could alter the picture appreciably.

No. 63-296-1. An ivory white variety with a medium number of broad bracts on tall, very straight plants. A distinguishing feature is that the center opening between the bracts is relatively small.

Ecke Varieties

Barbara Ecke Supreme. An attractive, orange-red variety with the largest diameter bract cluster of the varieties listed. This tall variety has been the most widely grown one in recent years. The bracts droop and fall rather rapidly after anthesis.

Elisabeth Ecke. A bright red variety which is a naturally short grower. It has large bract clusters with a small tight center, and blooms close to a week later than Barbara Ecke Supreme. It appears to last a little better than the preceding variety, but is no match for the Mikkelsen and USDA varieties. Rooting requires a few additional days.

Indianapolis Red. This variety was not grown at the University, but it produces a stocky plant with salmon-orange-red bracts. Some growers, especially those further south, prefer this variety. Cutting production is less than with other varieties.

The Ecke varieties are more showy than the Mikkelsen varieties when they reach maturity. Keeping quality thereafter is another story. Response of Barbara Ecke Supreme and Elisabeth Ecke to growth regulators was discussed in previous issues of this

bulletin. Rutgers reported that Indianapolis Red responded well to foliar sprays and soil drenches of CCC.

Literature Cited

Mitlehner, A.W. 1966. Poinsettia Variety Trials, April, 1965. New Jersey Plant and Flower Growers Association, Inc. Bulletin, 34.
