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POINSETTIA TIME USA — 1980¹

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The consumer seldom, if ever, has the opportunity to evaluate new floricultural products prior to the time they are purchased and placed in a home or office. Many plants available to the consumer are produced because of their ease of growing, a grower's personal preferences or due to encouragement by plant salesman. The consumers preferences are often limited because a "chain" of personalities "pre-choose" plants for them — the genetist, seed or plant company, the grower and the retail buyer which includes the florist, supermarket, retail grower or discount house.

The evaluations of consumer preferences for poinsettias were accomplished by Colorado State University in 1970 and 1971 (2).

The data source was limited to the Fort Collins area, which has because of its rapid growth rate, been considered the "melting pot" of the United States, for the past 15 years. Since the front range of Colorado is the fifth fastest growing (population) area in the nation, it appeared desirable to conduct a more comprehensive evaluation in 1980, thus "Poinsettia Time USA" was reinitiated.

More than 30 poinsettia cultivars of Hegg, Mikkelsen and Ecke were grown at the Colorado State University, W.D. Holley Plant Environmental Research Center, during the 1980 Christmas season. The "Poinsettia Time USA - 1980" theme was developed and promoted through displays of prime CSU grown plants, in three major shopping malls in eastern Colorado (Fig. 1). The displays were designed to

¹Appreciation is expressed to the Bedding and Pot Plant Committee of the Colorado Greenhouse Growers Association, Mikkelsens of Astabula, Ohio and Ecke Poinsettias of Encinitas, California for their participation in "Poinsettia Time USA - 1980."

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Figure 1. Poinsettia Time USA-1980, Consumer Evaluation Display.

not only educate the public, but allow them to describe their preferences, regarding plants in the display, by answering 21 questions on a pre-designed survey form.

The cities of Northglenn and Aurora, adjacent to the city of Denver, had a poinsettia display in their shopping malls and the third one was in the Foothills Shopping Mall in Fort Collins. Five hundred evaluation forms were available at each identical display. The consumers were encouraged to complete the form by offering them a chance to win a plant in a drawing held the last day. The plants were displayed December 10 through 22. A total of 1058 respondents (60.5%) completed most portions of the evaluation form.

Results

The average respondent was female and near 40 years of age, Table 1. There was almost an equal number of men from 20 to over 40 years of age, completing the forms.

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Table 1. The characteristics of consumers completing the poinsettia evaluation form at a Christmas time 1980 education display.

Age	Under 20	20-30	30-40	Over 40	Total
Men	35 (3.4)*	69 (6.5)	56 (5.2)	84 (7.9)	244 (23.0)
Women	58 (5.5)	247 (23.3)	202 (19.2)	307 (29.3)	814 (77.0)
Total	93 (8.8)	316 (29.8)	258 (24.5)	391 (36.9)	1058 (70.5)**

*Percent of 1058 respondents.

**Percent of responses to 1500 questionnaires.

Table 2. Consumer response to 1981 questionnaire: "Have you ever purchased a poinsettia?"

Age	Under 20	20-30	30-40	Over 40	Total
Men	Yes 13 (5.4)*	45 (18.5)	50 (20.6)	74 (30.5)	182 (75)
(243)*	No 22 (9.1)	24 (9.8)	6 (2.4)	9 (3.7)	61 (25)
Women	Yes 36 (4.4)	186 (23.1)	181 (22.3)	285 (35.2)	691 (85)
(809)*	No 22 (2.9)	60 (7.5)	18 (2.3)	18 (2.3)	118 (15)

*Based on the total number of men/women respondents.

Table 3. Consumer response to 1981 questionnaire: "Have you received a poinsettia as a gift?"

Age	Under 20	20-30	30-40	Over 40	Total
Men	Yes 9 (3.7)*	25 (10.4)	30 (12.4)	53 (22.0)	117 (48.5)
(241)*	No 26 (10.8)	44 (18.3)	25 (10.4)	29 (12.0)	124 (51.5)
Women	Yes 22 (2.7)	126 (16.0)	148 (18.2)	269 (33.1)	568 (70.0)
(812)*	No 36 (4.4)	121 (15.0)	50 (6.1)	37 (4.5)	244 (30.0)

*Based on total number of men/women respondents.

The purchaser of poinsettias is not the "younger generation" (Table 2). People over 40 apparently do the most poinsettia buying, which agreed with the 1971 data.

It is difficult to determine if a man personally received a poinsettia as a gift (Table 3) or was speaking for his household. Never-the-less, 65% of the respondents to the question, had received a poinsettia as a gift, with the majority being over the age of 40.

Table 4. There were 1025 responses to the evaluation question: "Which color poinsettia in the display do you prefer?" Error range \pm 2.7%.

Color Preferred	Men	Women	Total	% Responses
Red	166	573	739	72.0
Pink	20	68	88	8.6
White	6	17	23	2.2
Marble	28	116	144	14.0
Jingle Bells	12	19	38	2.9

Red poinsettias were by far the most "preferred" by the evaluators (Table 4). Once again (same results in 1971) it was perhaps due to the consumers association of the red poinsettia with Christmas or possibly they were not educated to the other colors at an earlier age. The color preferences can give a grower an indication of the percentage of colors he should be considering for production.

In recent years the grower has been the controlling factor in regards to the availability of poinsettias with the "oak-leaf" shaped bracts and leaves. He has found that the newer varieties perform better on his bench and in shipping. The retailer has had to accept the newer cultivars and in most instances, prefers them because of the ease of keeping them on display. In 1971 the Eckespoint C-1 was popular with the grower and consumer. It was not included in the 1980 displays. The most popular bract shape in 1980 was on the R-13 and Mikkel Dawn plants (Table 5). The addition of C-1 to the display might have changed the responses.

Table 5. Forty percent of the 977 respondents preferred the bract shape of three cultivars in the 1981 poinsettia display. Error range \pm 3.1%.

	Men	Women	Total	% Responses
R-13 (pinched)	43 (18.5)*	156 (21.0)	199	20.4
Mikkel Dawn (pinched)	26 (11.2)	78 (10.5)	104	10.6
R-13 (sgl. stem)	27 (11.6)	61 (8.2)	88	9.0

*Percent of total responses.

Dark Red Hegg was termed the most desirable red poinsettia displayed in 1971. Almost 50% of the respondents indicated that a new Ecke variety, R-13, was the most desirable "red" plant in the display in 1980 (Table 6).

Table 6. The five most popular red poinsettia cultivars based on 1026 responses. Error range \pm 2.7%.

	Men	Women	Total	% Responses
R-13	99 (42)*	392 (50)	491	48.0
R-13 (sgl. stem)	47 (20)	116 (15)	163	16.0
Ann Hegg				
Diva	7 (3)	53 (7)	60	6.0
Ann Hegg				
Lady	7 (3)	44 (6)	51	5.0
Mikkel Imp.				
Rochford	7 (3)	33 (4)	40	4.0

*Percent of men/women responses.

When asked which "pink" poinsettia in the display do you prefer, the majority of the respondents indicated a desire for the intense pink colors (Table 7). However, when asked which plant in the display had the most desirable overall plant shape, the same plants that ranked high in the previous questions represented more than 50% of the respondents desires (Table 8).

Table 7. The three most popular pink poinsettia cultivars based on 996 responses. Error Range \pm 3.1%.

	Men	Women	Total	% Responses
Gutbier's				
V-14 pink	86 (37)*	262 (34)	348	35.0
Mikkel				
Fantastic	74 (32)	223 (29)	297	30.0
Ann Hegg				
Hot Pink	40 (17)	172 (23)	212	21.0

*Percent responses (233 men, 763 women).

Table 8. The most popular total plant form, of 6 inch pots, in the 1980 poinsettia display. Error Range \pm 3.5%.

	Men	Women	Total	% Responses
R-13	34 (20)*	119 (22)	153	21.0
Mikkel Dawn	21 (12)	58 (11)	79	11.0
R-13				
Sgl. Stem	26 (15)	41 (8)	67	9.0
Gutbier's				
V-14 Pink	12 (7)	51 (9)	63	8.0
Ann Hegg				
Diva	10 (6)	41 (8)	51	7.0

*Percent of responses (171 men, 545 women).

Since the respondents were encouraged to complete the survey form and be eligible for one of the plants in the display, it is conjectured that the results from the question "Which plant would you like to receive as a gift?" was very representative of the respondents preferences (Table 9). The desire to receive a combination plant as a gift represented 40% of the results. The least desirable plant in the display was Jingle Bells (Table 10). The minipot, Ann Hegg Brilliant Red was also somewhat undesirable. It was

possibly considered to be out of place in the display due to its size.

Table 9. The five displayed cultivars that sixty five percent of the 1045 respondents preferred to receive as a gift.

Pinched Plants	Men	Women	Total	% Responses
R-13	48 (20)*	147 (18)	195	19.0
Combination				
1 ea, wh, pk, and red.	32 (13)	133 (17)	165	16.0
Combination				
2 red, 1 wh.	28 (12)	117 (15)	145	14.0
Combination				
2 marble,				
1 pink.	18 (7)	81 (10)	99	9.5
Mikkel Dawn	23 (10)	57 (7)	80	8.0

*Percent of responses (242 men, 803 women).

Table 10. A total of 1012 consumers responded to the question: "Which plant in the display is least desirable?"

	Men	Women	Total	% Responses
Jingle Bells	45 (19.0)*	159 (20.5)	204	20.2
Ann Hegg				
Top White	25 (11.0)	111 (14.3)	136	13.4
V-10				
Amy	28 (12.0)	66 (8.0)	94	9.3
Mini Pot	19 (8.0)	69 (8.8)	88	8.7

*Percent responses (235 men, 235 women).

Poinsettia Year-a-round?

There have been some indications that poinsettias, at least some colors, might be marketable at other times of the year. Therefore, a question on the survey was "Would you purchase one of these plants at a different time of the year?" Basically half of the respondents said yes (Table 11) and they would be inclined to purchase a variegated or pink cultivar in the spring (Table 12).

Table 11. Percent of 1042 consumers who would consider purchasing a poinsettia at a different time of the year.

	Yes %	No %
Men (239)*	50.6	49.4
Women (803)	47.0	53.0

*Number of responses.

Table 12. Poinsettia cultivars that might be purchased throughout the year, other than Christmas.

- Purchase other time of year? - (45% responded)

Spring	Anytime	Easter
20.8%	26.2%	22.0%

- Which plant would most likely be purchased?

Mikkel Dawn	V-14 Pink	R-13	Combination 2 Marble 1 Pk	Ann Hegg Top Wh.
18.0%	10.6%	9.5%	8.3%	7.6%

Value of Poinsettia

Consumers were asked where they would most likely purchase plant number 10 of the display, which was red, Annette Hegg Top Star. The supermarket was the main supplier and only one-third of the respondents would use a florist shop (Table 13). It was interesting to note that 60 percent of the respondents expected to pay \$5.50 to \$8.49 for a 6-inch, foiled poinsettia. The remainder expected to pay less than \$5.50 in the supermarket.

Table 13. Purchasing a 6-inch pinched poinsettia, foiled only.

	Purchase Where	Price
Supermarket	45%	\$5.50-\$ 8.49
Florist Shop	34%	\$8.50-\$11.99
Retail Grower	15%	\$5.50-\$ 8.49
Discount Store	6%	\$2.50-\$ 5.49

The 4-inch minipot poinsettia was associated with supermarket sales according to 60% of the respondents and only 10% would consider purchasing it in a florist shop (Table 14). The retail price, 50 percent of the consumers would expect to pay, ranged between \$2.50 and \$5.49.

Table 14. Purchasing a 4" pinched "mini" poinsettia, foiled only.

	Purchase Where	Price
Supermarket	60%	\$2.50-\$5.49
Retail Grower	18%	\$5.50-\$8.49
Discount Store	12%	\$2.50-\$5.49
Florist	10%	\$2.50-\$5.49

50.5% of consumers expected to pay \$2.50-\$5.49.

Discussion and Conclusions

In general the data obtained in 1980 was comparable to the 1970-71 results, but considered much more valid. All plants in the displays were of high quality, however the type and quantity of lighting probably varied between displays and certainly was not what can be expected in most homes.

It is also realized that plant culture and thus form, will vary from grower to grower. For example, R-13 was spectacular with CSU trials. Reports from across the nation indicated that several growers had problems with the trial cultivar, R-13. It is anticipated that Ecke will continue to screen R-13 clones.

It appears that the "under 20 generation" are not familiar with the poinsettia, especially as a gift potential. Therefore an educational program involving grade and junior high schools may be desirable. Acquainting the student with a poinsettia tree or photoperiod response in the classroom would provide a lasting image of the plant. Instead of throwing out all the leftover plants following Christmas, distribute a few to the science classes of your local schools, with a written explanation of how they can be re-flowered, made into a tree or used as a bonsai plant. A variety of colored cultivars should be included.

The responses to the combination pots were very positive. Forty one percent of 972 respondents preferred a combination of one white, pink and red pinched plants in a pot, while 36 and 24 percent preferred the pots containing 2 red plus 1 white and 2 marble and 1 pink, respectively. Similar "combination pot" results in 1971 caused a grower to construct 100 pots for Christmas sales to retailers. After the holiday season, the grower reported he "ate" 100 pots at a Christmas eve dinner. No doubt there was a need to educate the "retailer" regarding the availability, choice, etc. of combination plants, long before the holiday season. The wholesale price may have also been a factor; there has to be a reasonable mark-up for a unique plant.

It is questionable if the consumer would purchase poinsettias in the spring. The floriculture production class grew pink, white and red poinsettia plants as a class project. They were made available to the public the first of May and no plants sold. A consumer education program will have to be developed before the market potential can be determined.

The purpose of Poinsettia Time USA — 1980 was to demonstrate how plant producers can educate the public and also have an indication of what they desire to have available. Marc Cathey (1) indicated that consumer analysis should be a "first order" priority in regards to industry changes for the future. The information gained in this or comparable evaluations will be worthless unless the industry "follows up" on the results and incorporates it into their programs.

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