

# WHAT GROWS WHERE: ANNUAL SPECIALTY CUT FLOWERS

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The growing of specialty cut flowers (cut flowers other than roses, chrysanthemums and carnations) has increased dramatically in the last five years. Flowers for commercial production are grown in almost every state, mainly in the field but also in the greenhouse. This has been the result of a tremendous pressure on the standard cut flowers by overseas producers and the trend to the wild flower or "Laura Ashley" look in flower design. Many of the specialty cut flowers are not particularly good travelers and the competition in some species from overseas producers has not been as great.

The Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers conducted their first national trial of new cut flowers from seed in 1992. Breeders and distributors provided seed for 28 different cultivars of cut flowers and 21 growers volunteered to participate in the trial. Not all growers received all 28 crops. For example, stocks do better in the cool coastal areas than in the southeast and it made no sense to trial stock in warm locations. Similarly some crops were not sent to other locations because of climatic limitations.

Growers sowed, produced and sold their trials alongside their other crops and reported back to the ASCFG with their comments and figures. The yield, performance and growing and marketing comments were returned and evaluated by the ASCFG. An overall rating to 1 to 5 (5 = outstanding, 1 = terrible) was then assigned to all crops.


If the crop grew well, but could not be sold for love nor money, the overall rating declined. Conversely, if the market really went crazy (i.e. good price) for a particular plant, but the yield wasn't quite as high as desired, the rating was nudged up a little. Of the 21 trials, all but seven successfully completed their trials. This was not bad considering that this was the first year, and the volunteers really didn't know what they were getting into.

There were some awful dogs, but on the other hand, the saying that "one man's ceiling is another man's floor" is certainly appropriate when it comes to the sale of specialty cut flowers. The demand for the new and different is so strong today that I don't believe there is a single flower that cannot be sold, given the proper market outlet, reliable service and good quality. There were also some outstanding crops which not only were strong locally, but also received rave reviews throughout the country. Given the huge differences between locals in the trial, this is indeed remarkable.

The trials took place in 12 states\*. The plants that were trialed and their average grade out of 5 (5 = outstanding, 1 = terrible) are found in the table below.

<u>Plant tested</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Rating</u>
Agastache 'Licorice Blue'	Kieft Seed Co.	2.6
Agastache 'Licorice White'		3.0
Aster 'Matsumoto Yellow'	Sakata Seed Co.	3.2
Carthamus 'Tall Splendid Orange'		4.0
Carthamus 'Lasting Tangerine'		3.7
Celosia 'Flamingo Feather'	Ball Seed Co.	4.2
Celosia 'Peach Glow'	F. Gloeckner Co.	3.0
Centaurea 'Aloha'	Kieft Seed Co.	3.9
Chrysanth. 'Snow Bouquet'	TakiiSeed Co.	2.7
Delph. 'Messenger Lilac'	Kieft Seed Co.	2.6
Delph. 'Messenger Rose'		2.8
Didiscus 'Madonna'		2.6
Eustoma 'Echo Pure White'	Sakata Seed Co.	3.3
Eustoma 'Heidi Yellow'		2.8
Gomphrena 'Qis Orange'	Kieft Seed Co.	2.8
G. 'Qis Red'		3.5
G. 'Qis White'		3.3
G. 'Qis Purple'		4.3
G. 'Qis Rose'		3.7
G. 'Qis Pink'		2.7
G. 'Qis Lilac'		3.3
Statice 'Blue Waves'	F. Gloeckner Co.	3.7
Statice 'Soft Pastel Mix'	Kieft Seed Co.	3.9
Stock 'Cheerful Yellow'	Sakata Seed Co.	2.9
Sunflower 'Goldburst'	F. Gloeckner Co.	4.7

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As can be seen, some were far better than others. However, even though the average rating for some species (cultivars) may not look extremely outstanding, they may have performed well in certain locations.

Plants which can be recommended for a wide part of the country are:

*Carthamus* 'Tall Splendid Orange', (Sakata) is a wonderful orange-flowered safflower with good shelf life and market appeal. Better than other safflowers previously seen.

*Celosia* 'Flamingo Feather', (Ball is the first cultivar of wheat celosia available to the cut flower grower). This was, in many growers' words, "a real find... made doing the trials worthwhile." Flowering in spring, early summer and fall (in milder climates), this is a wonderful plant for fresh and dried flower growers.

*Gomphrena* 'Ois Purple' (Kieft), provided excellent color and good productivity. *Gomphrena* has been a staple for dried growers and the Ois series looked good, but 'Ois Purple' was a winner throughout the country.

*Helianthus* (Sunflower) 'Goldburst' (Gloeckner) was the winner in the trial sweepstakes. With an overall rating of 4.7, everyone who grew this, loved it. Four to five foot tall plants provided large yellow double flowers with no effort at all. Marvelous from Georgia to New York.

These nation-wide trials are a good thing for the cut flower industry. While individuals must evaluate their own climates, soils and markets, such trials help to highlight the good cultivars, introduce new crops, and help the new and unusual become mainstream in a short time. Congratulations to the ASCFG for undertaking such an initiative.

\* For more detailed information about the trials, contact the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers, 155 Elm St., Oberlin, OH 44074.



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**Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers  
National Trial Results, 1992.**

**Table 3. Crop evaluations, ASCFG National Trials, 1992**

Numbers across top refer to crops in table 1. Letters on left side refer to cooperating growers. The numbers inside are the overall crop rating (5=excellent, 1=poor), x means that crop was trialed but no results were possible due to natural causes.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
A			3			4		4	x	4	5		5	3					4		4			3	5
B							3		4													x			4
C			2	3	3	5				3	3	3	2	2			3		3		3	4	4	5	
D			4			5		4		x	x		4	4									3	1	
E	2					4		4	1	4	4		x	x	3	3		4	4	3	4		4	x	4
F	2		1		3	3	4		5			2	4	3			5		5		5			4	5
G	2	2		5	4	5	3		2			4	5	x			3		3		2	x	x	5	5
H	2	3	5	4	4	5		5					5	5	3	3		5		5			4	1	x
I	2					5						3	2	2	2	5		5		4			3		
J	x	x			4	3		2							2	2		4		2				2	
K	4	4	3	5	5	3			2			x	1	1			2		2		2		5	3	
L						x		5														5	5		
M							2															2			5
N			4	4		4			x	2	2		2	2										3	3
O				3	3	4		3		0	0				2	3		4		1				2	
P															5	5		4		1					
Q	4	3				5	3		2			1													5
<b>SUM</b>	18	12	22	24	26	55	15	27	16	13	14	13	30	22	17	21	13	26	22	16	20	11	31	29	32
<b>AVG</b>	2.6	3.0	3.2	4.0	3.7	4.2	3.0	3.9	2.7	2.6	2.8	2.6	3.3	2.8	2.8	3.5	3.3	4.3	3.7	2.7	3.3	3.7	3.9	2.9	4.7

One of the fastest growing, and potentially most profitable, areas of growing is the production of specialty cut flowers. Small growers concentrate on roadside stands and local florists and as the business expands, the larger retail/wholesale florists become the main sales outlets. The new Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers started in Georgia and is now a national organization with an excellent quarterly newsletter, publications about specialty cut flowers, a regional director from Georgia (Elizabeth Dean) and a directory of growers. For more information, contact Paul Thomas (706-542-2340), Allan Armitage (706-542-2471), Elizabeth Dean (404-463-9717), or Judy Laushman at the national office of ASCFG (216-774-2887).