

WHAT GROWS WHERE: ANNUAL SPECIALTY CUT FLOWERS

*Allan Armitage
University of Georgia*

Reprinted from the Georgia Commercial Flower Growers Newsletter Vol. 3, No. 2

The growing of specialty cut flowers (cutflowers other than roses, chrysanthemums and carnations) has increased dramatically in the last five years.

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 (ASCFG) conducted their first national trial of new cut flowers from seed in 1992.

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 (ASCFG) 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 re-

turned and evaluated by the ASCFG. An overall rating of 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 trialees, 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.

Table 1. Plants tested, sources and ratings for nationwide ASCFG cut flower test. (Ratings: 5=outstanding, 1=terrible.)

Plant tested	Source	Rating
Agastache 'Licorice Blue'	Kieft Seed Co.	2.6
Agastache 'Licorice White'	Kieft Seed Co.	3.0
Aster 'Matsumoto Yellow'	Sakata Seed Co.	3.2
Carthamus 'Tall Splendid Orange'	Sakata Seed Co.	4.0
Carthamus 'Lasting Tangerine'	Sakata Seed Co.	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
Chrysanthemum 'Snow Bouquet'	Takii Seed Co.	2.7
Delphinium 'Messenger Lilac'	Kieft Seed Co.	2.6
Delphinium 'Messenger Rose'	Kieft Seed Co.	2.8
Didiscus 'Madonna'	Kieft Seed Co.	2.6
Eustoma 'Echo Pure White'	Sakata Seed Co.	3.3
Eustoma 'Heidi Yellow'	Sakata Seed Co.	2.8
Gomphrena 'Qis Orange'	Kieft Seed Co.	2.8
Gomphrena 'Qis Red'	Kieft Seed Co.	3.5
Gomphrena 'Qis White'	Kieft Seed Co.	3.3
Gomphrena 'Qis Purple'	Kieft Seed Co.	4.3
Gomphrena 'Qis Rose'	Kieft Seed Co.	3.7
Gomphrena 'Qis Pink'	Kieft Seed Co.	2.7
Gomphrena 'Qis Lilac'	Kieft Seed Co.	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

Table 2. Crop evaluations, ASCFG 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 rating (5 = excellent, 1 = poor, X means that the 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						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					
J	X	X				4	3								2	2		4		2				2	
K	4	4	3	5	5	3			2			X	1	1			2		2		2		5	3	
L						X																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
SUM	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
AVG	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

Growers sowed, produced and sold their trials alongside their other crops and reported back to the ASCFG with their comments and figures.

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.

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.

These nationwide trials are a good thing for the cut flower industry. Congratulations to the ASCFG for undertaking such an initiative.

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 locales 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 Table 1.

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 (See Table 2 for individual flower ratings from each grower).

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

Caramanthus '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, 'Qis Purple' (Kieft) provided excellent color and good productivity. Gomphrena has been a staple for dried growers and the Qis series looked good, but 'Qis 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 nationwide 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.

