

2003 ASCFG National Perennial Trials

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We had a rather eclectic mix of perennials in the trials this year. One of the more unusual plants had to be *Spiranthes cerna* 'Chadds Ford' - the first orchid that we have tested. Orchids are usually thought of as delicate, tropical greenhouse crops, but many species are hardy garden perennials. While it is too soon to tell, the long spikes of small intricate flowers of 'Chadds Ford' may be beautiful but not large enough to be worth growing.

One of the standout cultivars was *Helianthus salicifolius* 'First Light'. This perennial relative of the common annual sunflower produced a great show late in the season when most other cuts were winding down. The strong, uniform, vigorous plants produced 8.8 stems per plant in the first season. We look forward to seeing what this species will produce in the second year. The stems were long and topped with clusters of bright yellow flowers with dark centers. In our postharvest trials (see accompanying article), the vase life was 12 days in water and up to 17 days in floral preservative.

Helenium 'Helena Red Shades' and 'Helena Gold' scored well in the trials. These tall, vigorous plants are cold hardy, drought tolerant, and productive, producing more than 13 stems/plant in the second year. The stems were more than 40 inches long with some trialers harvesting 48 to 50 inch stems. *Helenium* 'Helena Gold' has dark yellow daisy-shaped flowers and *Helenium* 'Helena Red Shades' has red flowers edged with varying amounts of yellow. The latter cultivar can be rather variable with some plants producing solid red flowers and others solid yellow. The only problem with these plants appears to be that their colors sell better in the fall than the summer when they normally flower. This species may be a good candidate for early season cutting back, when shoots are 6 to 10 inches tall, to delay flowering. One respondent also noted that plants may also reflower if cut back prior to the end of the first harvest, when about 10% of the flowers are still present.

The strikingly variegated leaves of *Lysimachia* 'Alexander' made a great cut foliage. The plants are prolific and vigorous. Cut this plant primarily for the foliage as the yellow flowers do not add much and tend to shatter in the vase. While stems were short for some folks, others cut up to 36 inch stems.

For sheer numbers of cut stems *Pennisetum* 'Karley Rose' was a top producer with an average of more than 36 stems/plant and at least one respondent cutting 75 stems/plant. Stem length was also good, averaging 34 inches. The prolific plants can be a bit difficult to harvest



'First Light'



'Chadds Ford'

and as with many grasses, some people love them while others, especially wholesalers, give them a pass.

Phlox are always a favorite cut flower and *Phlox paniculata* 'Miss Violet' did well in the trials. An average of 6.1 stems per plant were produced with a length of 26.3 inches. Respondents noted the color, fragrance and mildew resistance.

Based on trial results, the top five performers are automatically nominated for the ASCFG Cut Flower of the Year competition. The rankings are based on the combined ratings score: market appreciation (average of wholesale, florist, and consumer) + repeat again + ease of cultivation for those cultivars where more than three trialers responded. Thus, from the 2003 trials *Helianthus salicifolius* 'First Light', *Helenium* 'Helena Red Shades', *Lysimachia* 'Alexander', *Pennisetum* 'Karley Rose', and *Phlox paniculata* 'Miss Violet' are nominated as Cut Flowers of the Year and will join other nominations from ASCFG members.

Interpreting the trial results: The numbers reported are averages of all the respondents and many factors will affect the success of any plant species. Our participants are growing and harvesting the trial plants in a wide variety of ways. For example, with annual asters some people harvest the entire plant as one bunch while others harvest each individual flowering branch, giving very different stem lengths and yield data. After looking at the average, check the range of responses listed below each number to see how the cultivar performed at its best and its worst. If the range of responses in the ratings is narrow and high, i.e., 3-5 or 4-5, the plant was a winner for most of the respondents and is likely to do well for you. The 'Repeat Again Rating' is particularly important because it indicates if the trialer would take the time, money, and space to actually grow the cultivar again. Review the trial results carefully. If a species sounds interesting but did not appear to do well, try it anyway. The cultivar may work well for you.

Trial Results for Year 1 of Cultivars Planted in 2003. First row of data for each cultivar is the average and the second row is the range of responses. Note that when only one response is listed in the range line, either only one person responded for that category or several responded and all gave the same rating.

Cultivar	Plants flowering %	Plants dead at end of summer	Yield ^① (stems/plant)	Stem length (in) ^①	Market appreciation rating ^②			Repeat again rating ^②	Ease of cultivation rating
					W	R	C		
<i>Adenophora</i> 'Amethyst' WG	41 0-100	17 0-100	1.9 0-5	25.6 18-44	4.0 4	3.5 3-4	3.7 3-4	3.6 3-5	4.1 4-5
<i>Andropogon</i> 'Silver Sunrise' UN	80 0-100	0 0	1.3 1-3	29.6 32-48	2.0 2	2.0 2	1.0 1	3.0 1-4	5.0 5
<i>Campanula</i> 'Kent Belle' WG	65 0-100	29 0-100	2.2 1-4	24.2 9-40	5.0 5	3.5 2-5	4.0 3-5	3.0 2-5	3.7 2-5
<i>Caryopteris</i> 'First Choice' WG	55 0-100	35 0-100	5.0 0-15	15.5 12-20	3.0 1-5	3.0 1-5	3.3 1-5	3.8 1-5	4.0 3-5
<i>Digitalis</i> 'Pam's Choice' GS	40 0-100	20 0-80	-	-	-	-	-	4.0 3-5	4.0 3-5
<i>Eupatorium rugosum</i> 'Chocolate' GS	10 10	90 90	4.0 3-5	22 20-24	-	4.0 4	-	2.5 1-4	3.0 1-5
<i>Helianthus salicifolius</i> 'First Light' WG	58 0-100	30 0-100	8.8 5-20	28.4 14-36	4.0 3-5	5.0 5	4.5 4-5	4.3 3-5	4.4 3-5
<i>Heliopsis helianthoides</i> 'Summer Sun' GS ^③	50 0-100	63 0-100	14.0 14	24 24	3.0 3	3.0 3	-	3.0 3	4.0 4
<i>Helleborus xhybridus</i> SF	0 0	11 0-33	-	-	-	-	3.0	4.0 3	4
<i>Kniphofia thompsonii snowdenii</i> SF ^③	15 0-30	0 0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Lupinus</i> 'Morello Cherry' GS	56 0-100	65 0-100	0.4 0-2	10.2 7-24	2.5 1-4	2.5 1-4	3.5 3-4	2.2 1-3	3.8 3-4
<i>Phlox</i> 'Jeana' SF ^③	50 0-100	0 0	0.7 0-1	21.5 19-24	-	-	5.0 5	5.0 5	5.0 5
<i>Rudbeckia triloba</i> GS	81 20-100	51 0-100	6.6 0-20	29.9 8-48	3.0 1-5	3.7 1-5	4.6 4-5	3.7 1-5	3.6 1-5
<i>Spiranthes cerna</i> 'Chadds Ford' SF ^③	67 0-100	0 0	1 1	18 18	-	-	2.0 2	1.0 1	3.0 3

^①Data shown are from those respondents who harvested stems. Some respondents may not have harvested stems because they were too short. Flowering stems may be longer next year after plants are established. See comments section for more details.

^②1 to 5 scale, with 5 being the best. Market ratings are based on sales to wholesaler (W), retailers (R), or final consumers (C) direct.

^③Ratings for this species should be viewed with caution as only one to three participants had enough information to provide ratings.

Caryopteris 'First Choice'

Good Qualities: Great blue color (2); Might be a good late bloomer; Late summer bloomer and it's blue; Nice flower, ok vase life.

Problems: Too short to sell (2); If this plant survives the winter and gets more stem length it will be a good cut.

Additional Comments: Similar to *Caryopteris xclandonensis* 'Longwood Blue'; Retail florist were asking for more; All the plants I have listed from the perennial trials are 100% dead, may still be alive under mulch, I will know in the spring (Zone 6b); These plants are growing but still small – excessive rain hurt development and killed some; I lost a lot of these, I think they just stayed too wet this summer; Second season will tell all for this plant.

Digitalis 'Pam's Choice'

Good Qualities: Beautiful foxglove - dark maroon throat markings and speckles, balance of flower outside is white; Still growing, did not flower.

Problems: None listed by participants.

Additional Comments: All vegetative growth, 12 inches high; Grown from seed to flower for 2 years, this info is based on this fact, why would one want to buy plants, easy to grow from seed and are biennials; Nice color, maybe will have longer stems next year.

Eupatorium rugosum 'Chocolate'

Good Qualities: The color was wonderful, I'll see what lived through the summer and would purchase more of this one; Very nice white flower (ageratum-like) against white leaves.

Problems: Difficult to know when to harvest, Plant does not seem long-lived as perennial.

Additional Comments: I grew this plant for a few years but it died out easily, was difficult to know when to pick, and appreciated by only a few sophisticated florists; Shipping problems.

Helianthus salicifolia 'First Light'

Good Qualities: This plant is flourishing; This is blooming at a great

time: Sept/Oct, the color is brilliant, I hope the plants that lived will spread; Plants were in good shape on arrival, late summer bloomer, pretty good vase life; Small sunflower type flowers with very good vase life, a very usable size in bouquets, many side branches and a continuous bloom once it starts, most side branches over 24 inches and very useable, better vase life than other perennial sunflowers we have tried.

Problems: Postharvest questionable; Will need to be staked to prevent wind and rain damage once picking starts.

Additional Comments: Similar to other perennial sunflowers; As of 9/25/03, no color, only spikes no flower - bloomed 10/04/03; Believed plant died during winter shipping, we are Zone 5 while plants are Zone 6 minimum, never put out shoots from the dormant roots; Did not seem to be special/different than other *Helianthus*; It looks similar to a wild variety we have only this one is better; These plants disappeared in very wet spring; Could be great if it is hardy, and slightly more stems next season. (See article in this issue for postharvest testing of this cultivar.)

Heliopsis sanguinea 'Summer Sun'

Good Qualities: None listed.

Problems: Shipping problems; Drought, excessive weeds

Additional Comments: I think the retail florist will like this plant; Common as a weed, not very marketable, self sowing.

Helleborus xhybridus

Good Qualities: Plants were in good shape on arrival but small and late.

Problems: Plants were shipped in August.

Additional Comments: Planted out to field on 10/13/03 with only 4 inches of growth; Very small fragile plants, arrived too late to plant outside, growing in pots will winter over in cold frame; 2 very small plants are in 1-gallon pots waiting to be transplanted.

Kniphofia thompsonii snowdenii

Good Qualities:

Problems: Plants shipped late August; Very small plants.

Additional Comments: Planted out to field 10/13/03, all vegetative growth, 15 inches; Very small fragile plants, too hot to plant outside because plants arrived in July, growing in pots; 2 plants were placed in 1 gallon pots in spring and planted out in Sept. 3.

Lupinus 'Morello Cherry'

Good Qualities: Great color (3); If it would live here, I would love this plant and color (Zone 6B); Plants were in good shape on arrival, flowered quickly and then died; Good stem length, easy to grow.

Problems: Lupine is not a great cut as far as longevity; Bloomed too short to use; Not a good perennial here, it would be nice if it perennialized and grew taller; Poor vase life without treatment postharvest with silver, Russell hybrid lupines tended to be short lived, time will tell on this cultivar, it needs to throw more stems to be profitable to grow.

Additional Comments: Similar to Russell hybrid lupines; All vegetative growth, plant grew to 10 inches; Grown lot of *Lupinus* for cuts, this one looks like a Russell 'My Castle Red' which we grow easily from seed; I think we are just too hot for this one, if any lived, I may transplant them to a shade area and see how they do; I couldn't make up my mind about the color, sometimes I liked it because it is different and other times I didn't like it because it is kind of muddy; Second season will tell, it needs to be hardy and throw more stems.

Phlox 'Jeana'

Good Qualities: Great color and fragrance, mildew resistant.

Problems: Plants shipped in August; Deer love it.

Additional Comments: Plants were in pots in greenhouse, did not plant to field until 10/13/03; Plants received during hot summer, growing in pots,

annual, I can get it to bloom later; This plant just blooms at the wrong time – in mid August the gold colors are just “too” fall like, the flower is difficult for florists to use; Staking or netting necessary to prevent wind and rain damage.

Additional Comments: Similar to *Helenium kanaria* and *Helenium magnificum*; Color is not very popular for the time of year of flowering; Growing this as an annual-planting early and blooming in September might make it more salable, it grows very well and makes many long stems.



weeds; My customers bought it for the foliage, not the flower, it did very well and grew more this summer, it took the heat of summer very well; Vigorous, large flower size.

Problems: Brown spots on leaves (2); Yellow flowers get lost with foliage; I didn't cut it, plants grew well but flowers seemed insignificant, maybe good foliage stems; We used it as foliage because the blooms shed pretty quickly for us, the foliage held up well even in oasis; Needs to be staked, leaf margins easily burned by direct sunlight, should be lifted and divided after two years to keep stem caliper size strong.

Additional Comments: Similar to *Lysimachia punctata*; Poor customer appreciation; I am going to move some of it into some part shade to see if it will stretch out and maybe do even better; Best grown for foliage and cut before flowers, flowers do not add much, with the yellow blooms easily shattering in vase.

Nepeta subsessilis

Good Qualities: Great blue (2); Early blue flower, very prolific; Tall flowers, very green foliage, very long vase life; Large flower heads, pretty tall, vigorous; Nice herby fragrance, clean bright green foliage.

Problems: What stage to harvest? some florets brown up before most flowers open; It would be really great if the stems were a little straighter; Way too short to be a commercial cut

flower, some powdery mildew.

Additional Comments: Weak stems and kind of a washed-out blue color; This is such a good plant I have put in a 100 ft bed of it, hope I'm right about it - this is clear winner from 2002 trials; Too short.

Pennisetum 'Karley Rose'

Good Qualities: Healthy strong clumps; It did very well and I think it will continue to get bigger and better, the plume is a nice color and it's a tough plant; Nice beargrass-like foliage, nice flower plumes 8 inches long and feather like.

Problems: Limited market.

Additional Comments: Florist like this, I don't think the wholesalers appreciate the plant because of small bunches, very slow to pick; Very similar to wild pennisetum growing on the dry side of the island of Hawaii, near sea level in lava fields, seems to be very tough and cold hardy in Zone 6.

Phlox paniculata 'Miss Violet'

Good Qualities: Nice color (5); Fragrance, mildew resistant; It did very well this year, the blooms were beautiful and I was wishing I had 100 plants, the customers loved the color and phlox is always popular – once it is established, it did very well here; Strong grower; Good size flowers; Very high demand for wedding work, good plant vigor in second season.

Problems: Deer love it; Still suffering from the extremely poor condition the plants arrived in; Slower growth than Phlox 'Ice Cap', can not tolerate shade, plants growing in shade are too susceptible to powdery mildew.

Additional Comments: This did very well since it was mulched, planting it out in the field in the fall and mulching it made a huge difference; This is a nice phlox and makes a good cut flower, if it is available from other than Here and Now I'll plant more; Similar to other *Phlox paniculata*; Appears to be mildew resistant if not grown in shade, individual flower petals are larger than most *Phlox paniculata* cultivars.

Lysimachia 'Alexander'

Good Qualities: Striking variegated foliage (3); Very prolific, outcompeted