

# 2006 ASCFG National Perennial and Woody Trials

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Currently we are in the process of trying to reformat the perennial and woody cut flower trials due to problems with obtaining plant material and getting it to trialers. Consequently, we have only three cultivars in the perennial trial. We are, however, on year three of the woody trials. While some of the woody species are just now reaching production age, unfortunately, the number of trialers who still have the plants are dropping. As such, the report is a bit limited and we have incorporated the woody data into the comments section.

*Echinacea* continues to be a great genus. We highlighted it in last year's report and this year's cultivars have also done well. *Echinacea* 'Comet' is more like the original species, with long petals that droop with age, but the bright color was outstanding. Plants produced an average of 13 stems per plant at an average stem length of 21 inches. Trialers gave it the highest ratings of the three perennials in the trials. *Echinacea* 'Primadonna' was also nice but had a lower yield per plant, 2.5 stems.

Kelly Wilson of Hillwood Museum and Gardens in Washington, D.C. alerted us to a fun, new cut flower. She tested *Phlox* 'Pleasant Feelings' and 'Midnight Feelings' and reported great results for 'Pleasant Feelings'. Both cultivars are novel in that they don't have petals, allowing the distinctive bracts to show. 'Pleasant Feelings' has bright green bracts, while 'Midnight Feelings' has darker, finely textured bracts. 'Pleasant Feelings' produced 7 stems per plant in the first year and had an excellent vase life of two weeks in foam, due to the lack of petals.

Two of the woodies that did well the first year after planting have continued to do well in the trials. Certainly, *Hydrangea* 'Limelight' shows no sign of letting up. Trialers reported 20 to 25 stems/plant and great market appreciation. The large flower heads and strong stems make this a great cut. We tested the vase life, which averaged 11 days when harvested at the green stage. Flowers harvested when more mature typically last longer.

*Physocarpus* 'Diabolo' also has continued to perform well, primarily as a cut foliage. As the plants have grown larger, the number of harvestable stems per plant has increased to 35 stems/plant. We tested 'Diabolo' as a cut foliage and had a vase life of 18 to 22 days.

*Callicarpa* 'Early Amethyst' is also a heavy producer and very easy to grow, but postharvest is a problem as it shatters quite easily. The shattering in combination with the necessary leaf removal make this cultivar less attractive as a cut.



*Aronia* 'Brilliant' finally produced a good crop for us this year. The branches were loaded with deep red berries and were very attractive. The long stems were easy to cut and while the berries were not hard, they were also not juicy. The lack of juiciness makes them less likely to be a messy problem for consumers. Other trialers have reported little fruit set. Either the cultivar takes a while to mature or produces a variable crop from year to year.

Based on trial results, the top performers are automatically nominated for the ASCFG Cut Flower of the Year competition. The rankings are based on the combined ratings score: market appreciation + repeat again + ease of cultivation for those cultivars where more than three trialers responded. Thus, from the 2006 trials *Echinacea* 'Comet' is nominated as Cut Flower 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.

**Acknowledgments:** All cut flower growers should thank the perennial and woody plant producers for providing the plant materials and the growers for producing the plants, collecting data and submitting trial reports. The growers paid for shipping expenses and agreed to provide data for at least two years. Plant were donated by perennial producers and shipped as the perennial plugs or dormant roots directly to the trialers. I would like to compliment Carolyn Ramsbotham and Vicki Stamback who participated in both the seed and perennials trials and returned evaluations on all of their trial plants. A hearty thank you to all of the evaluators who returned their trial reports and to the seed companies for providing such great cultivars. Thanks to Ingram McCall and Diane Mays for taking care of the North Carolina State University portion of the trials, Ingram McCall for data entry, Erin Possiel, Tina Krug, Brad Holland, and Tim Ketchie for assisting with the NCSU trials, and Nick Corby and Helen Kraus for laboriously typing in everyone's comments. In preparing the report I have edited the participants' comments for space and clarity; my apologies if I've altered the tone or content of anyone's comments. Also, in a few cases we could not determine what was written.

#### Participating Perennial Suppliers

**Gro 'N' Sell/Benary (GS)**

320 Lower State Rd.  
Chalfont, PA 18914  
(215) 822-1276  
fax (215) 997-1770  
www.gro-n-sell.com  
www.sunfarm.com

#### Participating Perennial Trial Growers

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Madbury, NH

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Diane Mays,  
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North Carolina  
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**Brenda Smith**

Smith & Smith Farms  
Dayton, NV

**Vicki Stamback**

Bear Creek Farm  
Stillwater, OK

**Tom Wikstrom**

Happy Trowels Farm  
Ogden, UT

#### Participating Woody Plant Suppliers

**Bailey Nursery (BA)**

1325 Bailey Rd.  
St. Paul, MN 5511994  
(651) 459-9744  
(800) 829-8898  
fax (651) 459-5100  
www.baileynursery.com

**United States National  
Arboretum (NA)**

3501 New York Avenue, NE  
Washington, D. C. 20002-1958  
(202) 245-2726  
fax (202) 245-4575  
www.usna.usda.gov

**Spring Meadow Nursery (SM)**

12601 120<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Grand Haven, MI 49417-9621  
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#### Participating Woody Trial Growers

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**Ingram McCall, Diane Mays,  
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North Carolina  
State University  
Raleigh, NC

**Susan Wright**

Shady Grove Gardens  
Vilas, NC

**Trial Results for Year 2 of Perennial Cultivars Planted in 2004.** The first row of data for each cultivar is the average and the second row is the range of responses. Note 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 surviving (%)	Yield stems/plant	Stem length (inches)	Market appreciation rating <sup>o</sup>	Repeat again rating <sup>o</sup>	Ease of cultivation rating <sup>o</sup>
<i>Echinacea</i> 'Primadonna'	<b>99</b> 98-100	<b>2.5</b> 0-6	<b>20.5</b> 18-24	<b>2.8</b> 1-4	<b>3.3</b> 1-5	<b>4.0</b> 3-5
<i>Echinacea</i> 'Comet'	<b>94</b> 83-100	<b>12.8</b> 3-35	<b>21</b> 14-25	<b>4.0</b> 3-5	<b>4.5</b> 4-5	<b>4.8</b> 4-5
<i>Lobelia</i> 'Fan Salmon'	<b>38</b> 0-63	<b>3.5</b> 0-7	<b>18.5</b> 18.5	<b>5.0</b> 5	<b>3.0</b> 1-5	<b>4.0</b> 3-5

<sup>o</sup>1 to 5 scale, with 5 being the best. Market ratings are based on sales to wholesalers, retailers, or final consumers direct.

### Summary of Comments

The number in parenthesis refers to the number of respondents who made the comment. If no number is present, only one person made the comment. Comments by each individual are separated with a semicolon (;) Note: many respondents did not make specific comments on each cultivar and in some cases, comments have been shortened because of limited space.

#### 2006 Perennial Cut Flower Trial Cultivar List - Year 2

##### *Echinacea* 'Comet'

**Good qualities:** Easy to grow, pretty green cone; This was the favorite flower of one of the bouquet makers this season, she said it should be flower of the year; No droop petals, each cut flowers stem had only few branches, so the cuts were very useable in bouquets.

**Problems:** Slow growing, plants still small after one year, drooping petals; Could have a little longer stems, this may come next season; Japanese beetles.

**Additional comments:** No sign of these as of this summer, now that we are using plastic mulch - we are going to have some covered beds just for trial plants which should increase our success once the perennial trial program gets going again.

##### *Echinacea* 'Primadonna'

**Good qualities:** Good color (3); Easy to grow; Lots of coloring.

**Problems:** We did not like this color and did not use it; Too many branching stems on main cutting stem, difficult to use in bouquets and too few cutting stem per plant, insect problem- Japanese Beetle.

**Similar cultivars:** Most echinacea

**Additional comments:** I thought they had all died and saw a couple of plants blooming this summer, they were very nice but I didn't harvest them- just letting them multiply and I'll see if I can get a bed of them established. I do think my customers would like them a lot.

##### *Lobelia* 'Fan Salmon'

**Good qualities:** Very nice color (2).

**Problems:** Lost most plants in the first summer, lost all the rest over the winter, they arrived as great looking transplants - apparently does not like our conditions; Zone 5 is cold for the Fan series, flowers 3 to 4 inches tall- not useable, our first flowers appear mid September just before frost. **Additional comments:** This is one that would definitely benefit from the plastic mulch, I know lobelia is a great cut and this salmon one would be popular with my customers, there are quite a few perennials we've trialed in the past that my customers would love but they weren't successful for us due to weeds, I'll buy some again now that we have the mulch.

#### 2005 Woody Cut Flower Trial Cultivar List - Year 3

##### *Aronia arbutifolia* 'Brilliant'

**Good qualities:** Landscape shrub, nice fall color.

**Problems:** Leaf fall, fruit not attractive; I'm not getting very good fruit set on this, I have some in full sun and other in shade, shade is better (Zone 7).

**Additional comments:** 100% flowered and none died since last year, stem length was 20 inches, easy to grow (rating of 5), market appreciate rating of only 1, however.

##### *Callicarpa dichotoma* 'Early Amethyst'

**Good qualities:** Little problem with insects; great color.

**Problems:** Fruit shatter (2); Leaves wilt like crazy because they are going into senescence; I don't think that this is particularly notable, not sure it is any earlier.

**Additional comments:** 100% flowered and none died since last year, 33 stems/plant harvested, stem length was 36 inches, easy to grow (rating of 5), market appreciate rating of only 1, however.

**Postharvest recommendations:** If you wait until frost to remove the leaves the youngest (top) berries will be brown; Average vase life of 14 days.

*Cotinus* 'Young Lady'

**Good qualities:** Flowers on very young plants.

**Problems:** I guess that I prefer the red foliage types because I can use the foliage.

*Heptacodium miconioides*

**Good qualities:** Interesting flowers and fruit.

**Problems:** The leaves should be removed to see the flowers and fruit well.

**Additional comments:** We cut the reddish bracts, seed pods instead of the flowers; These really haven't done much yet (planted in the wrong place) but I'm optimistic; 100% flowered and none died since last year, 10 stems/plant harvested, stem length was 30 inches, easy to grow (rating of 5), market appreciate ratings of 3 to 4.

*Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight'

**Good qualities:** Easy to bloom, both in age and in season, Large and tight everyone loves them, great flowers; great plant, 25 stems per plant, full sun, flowers mature in full sun here

**Problems:** Small amount of browning, but usually sold before that stage.

**Additional comments:** I need to corner this market; 100% flowered and none died since last year, 20 stems/plant harvested, stem length was 24 inches, easy to grow (rating of 5), market appreciate ratings of only 4 to 5.

**Postharvest recommendations:** Easy, quick dip to holding solution; vase life of 14 days.

Note: Check out the separate postharvest article in this issue for more information on postharvest vase life and treatments.

*Ilex verticillata* 'Berry Nice'

**Good qualities:** They do lose their leaves eventually and hold their berries even after 17 degree weather, will probably shorten the berry life though, hope they hold until Christmas, this is the 1st year with berries.

**Problems:** Male should have been shipped with female, 'Jim Dandy' finally worked but are two years behind the 'Nice Berry', hoping for heavier fruit set next year, adequate this year, 'Southern Gentlemen' and 'Early Male' do not work; My deer thank you, I cannot grow ilex because the deer ravage it.

**Similar cultivars:** 'Winter Gold' holds its leaves longer, a problem because it is the "color" for November and October.

**Additional comments:** Wholesalers already had source, thought \$6.00/lb. too high, hard to find fair market value on most of these, we cut ours short for the retail florist and consumer sales, could have had 48 inches on some, will need to try other markets for winter sales; 100% flowered and none died since last year, 15 stems/plant harvested, stem length was 24 inches, easy to grow (rating of 5), market appreciate ratings of 3 to 4.

*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Diabolo'

**Good qualities:** Easy; Foliage looked good all summer and was nice to have something to cut whenever we needed it; Nice foliage color; Great plant in full sun, used primarily for foliage, 35 stems per plant.

**Problems:** It has taken a long time for florist to warm up to this, no consumer sale at all, color maybe "out" soon.

**Similar cultivars:** 'Gold Nugget' has better flowers.

**Additional comments:** Interesting in bud and has red seed pods. A foliage plant as the blooms have only a 1-week window; 100% flowered and none died since last year, 35 stems/plant harvested, stem length was 38 inches, easy to grow (rating of 5), market appreciate ratings of 1 to 4.

**Postharvest recommendations:** Vase life of 7 days.

Note: Check out the separate postharvest article in this issue for more information on postharvest vase life and treatments.

*Prunus mume* 'Double Red'

**Good qualities:** Nice, very similar to 'Bonita', 30 stems/plant.

*Sambucus edulis*

**Good qualities:** None (2).

**Problems:** Still coming up in the bed I pulled it out of two years ago, definitely a weed; No postharvest life, vigorous grower.

**Additional comments:** Never bloomed, stinky foliage.

*Syringa x hyacinthiflora* 'Asessippi'

**Problems:** Still too small to use for cutting, maybe next year, mildew this year; Dead.

**Insects/diseases:** Powdery mildew.

**Additional comments:** Slow to establish a cutting stand; 100% flowered and none died since last year.

*Syringa vulgaris* 'Beauty of Moscow'

**Problems:** Still too small to use for cutting, maybe next year, mildew this year; Dead.

**Insects/diseases:** Powdery mildew.

**Additional comments:** Slow to establish a cutting stand; 100% flowered and none died since last year.

*Viburnum dentatum* 'Blue Muffin'

**Good qualities:** This one has done very well, 30 stems per plant, short stems 12-14 inches.

**Problems:** Still waiting for fruit to set although it did finally bloom this year.

**Additional comments:** May need another *V. dentatum* to set fruit, although *V. 'Northern Burgundy'* doesn't set fruit either, we may not have the pollinator; 100% flowered and none died since last year.