

2008 ASCFG National Perennial and Woody Trials

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The perennial and woody trials were off to a slow start this year as both trials were reestablished in 2008 and few of the plants had much to show yet. With the perennials we like to see flowering in the first year and happily all but the *Baptisia* 'Purple Smoke' (Gro 'N' Sell) produced a few flowers. Most of the perennials, however, did not produce enough harvestable flowers to give us a good evaluation. The most prolific bloomer was *Leucanthemum* 'Summer Snowball' (Gro 'N' Sell) - all plants flowered, producing an average of 14 stems per plant, averaging 18 inches long. This cultivar was quite productive for the first year. While some trialers commented on the vigorous plants and pure white flowers, others thought the cultivar was "very conventional", resulting in ratings that were not very strong. *Agastache* 'Sangria' (Jelitto Seed) also put on a good show with 11 stems per plant at 21 inches long. The flowers have a beautiful color and are fragrant but the stems were a bit "too wispy", as one trialer commented.

Interest in *Echinacea* has exploded over the last few years and we had two cultivars, 'Double Decker' and 'Summer Sky' (Gro 'N' Sell), in the trials. Both produced a few flowers this year, a little over 4/plant, but we are expecting many more for next year. 'Double Decker' has an unusual appearance, producing petals from the top of the cone as well from around the base. Unfortunately, the small print states that the unusual flowers do not start to appear until the plants are well established. By the end of the season we noticed a few flowers starting to produce petals from the top of the cone but nothing like in the pictures. One other trialer also noted that he "finally got some doubles late". Anticipation is half the fun of growing plants and we are eager to see how they will do next season.

Of the woody cultivars, only the fast-growing *Callicarpa americana* 'Welsh's Pink' flowered in the first year, producing 4.5 stems/plant, which were 37 inches long. While only two trialers rated the plants, however, they liked the cultivar and gave it high marks for vigor, nice color and long stems. We will have to see next year how the rest of the woodies perform.

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 perennial plugs or dormant roots directly to the trialers. I would like to compliment Chas Gill, Betsy Hitt, Carolyn Ramsbotham, and Vicki Stambach who participated in both the seed and perennials trials and returned evaluations on all of their trial plants. I would also like to thank Amber Stewart and Betty Coleman for laboriously typing



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in everyone's comments, Ingram McCall and Diane Mays for taking care of the North Carolina State University portion of the trials, Ingram McCall for data entry, and Leslie Tichner, Aliya Donnell, Brad Holland, and Tim Ketchie for assisting with the NCSU trials. 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. Thanks to everyone for making this service of ASCFG possible.

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.



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Trial Results for Year 1 of Perennial Cultivars Planted in 2008. 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 received alive (%)	Plants flowering (%)	Yield stems/plant ^①	Stem length (inches) ^②	Market appreciation rating ^②	Repeat again rating ^②	Ease of cultivation rating ^②
Agastache	100	100	11	21.3	2.8	3.4	3.6
'Sangria' (JS)	100	100	5-19	18-30	1-5	2-5	2-5
Baptisia	74	0	-	-	-	-	-
'Purple Smoke' (GS)	50-100						
Digitalis	100	32	0.6	17	2.8	2.8	3.5
'Candy Mountain' (GS)	100	4-100	0-1	12-24	2-3	2-3	3-4
Echinacea	100	93	3.4	19	3.0	3.3	4.8
'Double Decker' (GS)	100	80-100	0-5	12-24	1-4	1-5	4-5
Echinacea	85	90	4.1	15	3.6	3.6	4.4
'Summer Sky' (GS)	75-100	75-100	1-12	12-19	2-4	1-5	3-5
Echinops	94	31	4.5	-	1.0	1.5	3.5
'Star Frost' (JS)	75-100	0-100	4.5		1	1-2	3-4
Gaillardia	98	22	2.8	16	3.3	3.0	3.5
'Amber Wheels' (JS)	90-100	0-80	0-5.5	12-20	2-4	2-4	3-4
Leucanthemum	100	100	13.8	18	2.8	2.8	4.2
'Summer Snowball' (GS)	100	100	3-40	15-20	1-4	1-5	3-5
Penstemon	69	73	2.9	12.3	2.5	1.7	2.0
'Starburst Amethyst' (JS)	0-100	20-100	1-7	10-15	2-3	1-3	1-3

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.



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Summary of Comments

2008 Perennial Cut Flower Cultivar List - Year 1

Agastache 'Sangria'

Good Qualities: Smells great (3); Nice flower color, long stems; Nice stem length; A nice filler flower.

Problems: Flowers shatter fast; Too wispy; Bloomed very late in the season just as we were ending markets so I don't feel we can judge it adequately, hope it will survive the winter here - I tried agastache 'Tutti-Frutti' a few years back and it did not make it here in zone 5.

Similar Cultivars: 'Pink Pop'; 'Tutti Frutti'.

General Comments: No specific insects or diseases observed (2); I had just pulled out all my agastache vowing "never again" when this arrived, it's nice, but I have a very limited market for it; It may have flowered earlier, and been more useful to us if we have gotten it in the ground sooner, the shipment arrived in terrible shape and had to be transplanted into pots and held for several weeks before setting out in beds.

Baptisia 'Purple Smoke'

Good Qualities: Nice foliage.

Problems: Grows slow(ly); Plants were small and have struggled, I'm not sure what I'll see in the spring; Flowers second year, looks like other purple digitalis.

Similar Cultivars: Seems to have a finer leaf than *Baptisia australis*.

General Comments: No specific insects or diseases observed; It usually takes three years for *Baptisia* to produce. Maybe next year there will be some. The plants were in terrible shape when they arrived. Of the 11 plants that were planted only 6 plants survived to the end of the season. I use a lot of *Baptisia*, both flower and foliage, so am anxious to see the flower color ...next year?; Plants are much weaker than *australis*, I already grow this and didn't get much to cut until the third year. It is pretty, and much more branched than *australis*, but not as popular with consumers; Did not bloom this year.

Digitalis 'Candy Mountain'

Good Qualities: Ease of cultivation - spikey form a good addition to bouquets, color pleasing and unusual.

Problems: Stem length seemed too short to be truly useful. Selling at market I felt compelled to warn people that *Digitalis* was poisonous if ingested. People with pets and children appreciated the information. Most chose not to buy it.

The Cut Flower Quarterly

General Comments: No specific insects or diseases observed; Good color but too early to tell; Few blooms this year; I'm anxious to see how it performs next year.

Postharvest Handling:

The flower was placed in water with no preservative added. I'll experiment a bit more next year.

Echinacea 'Double Decker'

Good Qualities: Strong plants; Something "different"; Pretty color, finally got some doubles late in the season; Lots of flowers.

Problems: UGLY; Bloomed very late in the season with only one bloom per plant, not all of the plants produced a double bloom, about half of the plants produced a single bloom; I didn't like it, very irregular, some plants were double...or whatever you want to call that...and others were normal; There was even a lot of variation in flower form of the double ones; The flowers are inconsistent in flower placement, some look normal, others look weird.

Similar Cultivars: If so, don't tell me about it.

General Comments: No specific insects or diseases observed; The plants did not produce enough this year to take to market. Hoping next year will be better. They may not all be 'Double Decker' plants.

Echinacea 'Summer Sky'

Good Qualities: Wonderful peachy pink color sets it apart from other coneflowers that are more of a magenta pink (4); Pretty gradation of color on the petals; Strong stems; Pretty strong grower.

Problems: Weak plants; Flower petals not very compact

General Comments: No specific insects or diseases observed; Plants did not produce enough stems this year to be able to get a true picture. Hoping stem length will be longer - The color is certainly a winner!

Echinops 'Star Frost'

Problems: The flowers have ugly thorns, several years ago I received seed for a white-flowering echinops from a friend, this one is the same cultivar, we plowed 'Star Frost' in because they are invasive on our farm; Plants arrived in poor shape, had to be transplanted into pots to recover before transplanting into permanent bed, we did not have enough stems to market test.



Baptisia 'Purple Smoke'

General Comments: No specific insects or diseases observed (2); Too early to tell; Did not bloom this year; Hoping for better production next year to get a better sense of stem length and flower color.

Gaillardia 'Amber Wheels'

Good Qualities: Beautiful color; Only two plants produced flowers but they were quite large and on sturdy, long stems; Tough plant, we'll see what they look like next year.

Problems: Arrived in poor shape. Needed to be transplanted into pots and held a few weeks before planted in beds.

General Comments: No specific insects or diseases observed (2); Too early to tell; Few blooms this year; Next year will tell the tale, the size and color of the flower, and the stem length look very promising.

Leucanthemum 'Summer Snowball'

Good Qualities: Lots and lots of flowers, nice pure white; Produced well the first year. Looks more like a mum than a traditional daisy, nice clear bright white color that didn't appear dirty; Vigorous plant, stems were strong.

Problems: Weak stems, browning out; Flowers tend to have a bent neck perhaps because the flower is so dense, one customer complained about that; Thrips, personally I don't like flowers to be that double - I also had a lot of browning in the centers...probably thrips but they looked kind of "dirty".

General Comments: No specific insects or diseases observed (2); Thrips, but no worse than any other leucanthemum; Too boring, and too early for "mum" look, very conventional; I'll again be anxious to see what is produced the second year, am hoping for longer stems.

Postharvest Handling: I did not use a preservative, just water.

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Penstemon 'Starburst Amethyst'

Good Qualities: Blooms the first year; Very pretty color.

Problems: Very short (2); Hard to use in bouquets because of short stems filled with flowers, think it would make a better garden plant than a cut; Weak stems.

General Comments: No specific insects or diseases observed (2); If stem length is better next year, we can market test, plants bloomed very late in the season, they were not in good shape when they arrived and had to be transplanted into pots and held for several weeks before placing in beds; I have in part shade and I may move it for next year.

2008 Woody Cut Flower Cultivar List - Year 1

Callicarpa americana 'Welsh's Pink'

92% of plants flowered this year, yielding 4.5 stems, which were 37 inches long. One trialer gave the following scores: 3 for wholesale marketability, 4 for retail florist, 4 for consumer and 3 for grow again and 5 for ease of cultivation. A second trialer gave the following scores: 5 for consumer marketability and 5 for grow again and 5 for ease of cultivation.

Good Qualities: Nice color, good form, long stems.

Problems: Berries shatter easily, not sure if they would hold in vase since they fall off in the field if touched; Not enough stems to determine vase life at this time.

General Comments: Easy to grow, vigorous, nice color, long stems, berries shatter.

Clethra alnifolia 'Ruby Spice'

All plants flowered for one trialer but none did for another trialer.

Good Qualities: None.

Problems: Died in summer heat.

General Comments: Not enough growth this year for an opinion.

Craibiodendron yunnanensis

Good Qualities: None.

Problems: Did not survive summer heat.

Cytisus scoparius 'Windlesham Ruby'

Good Qualities: Too soon to tell.

Problems: Did not bloom yet.

General Comments: I haven't harvested anything from these yet; Seems to be doing well, but did not bloom this year.

Indigofera amblyantha

All plants flowered for one trialer but for another all plants arrived dead.

Pieris japonica 'Dodd's Crystal Cascade Falls'

All plants died for one trialer, while none died for the other.

Good Qualities: None.

Problems: Withered and died in our hot climate, *Pieris* can not be grown in the Sacramento Valley due to heat, even in full shade it would not do very well here.

General Comments: Best in cool coastal climates.

Spiraea prunifolia. No comments so far.

Viburnum tinus 'Spirit'

One out of three trialers had flowering this year and all plants flowered.

Good Qualities: Seems to like our climatic conditions (Zone 7).

Problems: First year: Very short. It is a shrub so I assume it will get bigger in subsequent years; No blooms this year.

General Comments: No harvest this year; Too soon to comment on this plant, did not bloom.



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