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# 2009 ASCFG NATIONAL Perennial Trials

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The new *Echinacea* cultivars keep coming and each one seems bolder, brighter or more unusual than the last one. ‘Tiki Torch’ and ‘Tomato Soup’ (Terra Nova) are knock-your-socks off orange—a color unheard of in coneflowers not that long ago. Both cultivars were in the trials for the first year but still produced several harvestable flowers per plant, which ranged in length from 10 to 19 inches. While the plants at NCSU flowered, other trialers did not have blooms this first year. Three other cultivars were also in the trials: ‘Mac n’ Cheese’, ‘Merlot’ and ‘Purity’ (Terra Nova) and all did well.

We had two coneflower cultivars in last year’s trials: ‘Double Decker’ and ‘Summer Sky’ (Gro ‘N’ Sell). Both produced many more flowers and longer stems in the second year. ‘Big Sky’, a softer orange than ‘Tiki Torch’ averaged 12.5 stems per plant with stem lengths up to 2 feet. ‘Double Decker’ is an unusual-looking cultivar that produces petals from the top of the cone as well as those around the base. The suppliers tell us that the unusual flowers do not start to appear until the plants are well established. Unfortunately, we did not get very many

of the unusual flowers and from reading the comments, the other trialers did not either. The plants are certainly very hardy and durable as none of the trialers lost any plants from last year.

Unfortunately, growers in the center of the U.S. will have a difficult time growing coneflowers for more than a year or two due to aster yellows phytoplasma (AYP). As Laurie Hodges pointed out, this leafhopper-transmitted disease is especially prevalent in the central states. It can kill plants quickly if they are infected when young; however, the disease tends to be more common later in the season, when plants tend to show stunted stems and abnormal greenish flowers. There is no cure and the best control is to rogue out infected plants as soon as you see them to prevent spread of the disease.

Another second-year perennial, *Leucanthemum* ‘Summer Snowball’ (Gro ‘N’ Sell), continued to impress the trialers. Flowering was prolific, with an average of 29.5 stems per plant; at NCSU we harvested 56 stems/plant. These plants are hardy as none were lost over the winter and all flowered this year. Stem length averaged 19.7 inches. The flowers are an



‘Tomato Soup’



‘Purity’



‘Mac -n-Cheese’



‘Big Sky’



‘Merlot’



‘Tiki Torch’

unassuming double white but they make great fillers.

*Baptisia* 'Purple Smoke' (Gro 'N' Sell) stood out for us because of its versatility and durability. At NCSU our plants grew quite strong this year and we harvested 18 flowering stems per plant, which averaged 21 inches long. After harvest very little foliage was left (see photo on p. 49) but the plants rebounded and produced a flush of stems. We did not harvest the stems for foliage but others have been cutting baptisia as a filler foliage. If not harvesting the flowers, trialers are also using the pods. What more could you ask for – cut flowers, foliage and pods on a hardy durable plant? If 'Purple Smoke' is like other baptisias, we expect the plants will be long lived. The genus *Baptisia* has a number of species in a broad range of colors: purple, white, cream, and yellow. I expect we will see many hybrids in a few years, spanning the color range, just as we are seeing now with *Echinacea*. One problem with the flowers, however, is that they tend to shatter easily. We have not tested the anti-ethylene agents EthylBloc and AVB, yet, but they may prevent that problem.

The woody trials are in their second year and unfortunately, we were able to get data only from our plants here at NCSU. This might be because the trialers have either lost or removed most of the trial plants. The best one for us was *Callicarpa americana* 'Welsh's Pink'. It was productive in its first year and produced even more stems this year. The pink color of the berries is quite attractive but the berries tend to discolor fast in the field. You may have to cut early before the berries are all well colored and tip the stems to remove the green berries at the ends.

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 + repeat again + ease of cultivation for those cultivars where more than three trialers responded. Thus, *Echinacea* 'Big Sky Summer Sky', 'Tiki Torch', 'Tomato Soup', *Leucanthemum* 'Summer Snowball', and *Monarda* 'Raspberry Wine' are nominated as Cut

Flowers of the Year and will join nominations from the seed trials and from ASCFG members.

**Interpreting the trial results:** The numbers reported are averages of all the respondents. 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. Plants were donated by perennial producers and shipped as the perennial plugs or dormant roots directly to the trialers. We would also like to thank Ingram McCall for taking care of the North Carolina State University portion of the trials and Erin Moody, Erin Regan, Diane Mays, Alicain Carlson, Emma Locke and Qianni Dong for harvesting and assisting with the NCSU trials. In preparing the report we have edited the participants' comments for space and clarity; apologies if we've altered the tone or content of anyone's comments. Thanks to everyone for making this service of ASCFG possible.

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**Trial Results for Year 2 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.

Species	Cultivar	Plants died over winter (%)	Plants flowering (%)	Yield stems/plant <sup>o</sup>	Stem length (inches) <sup>o</sup>	Market appreciation rating <sup>o</sup>	Repeat again rating <sup>o</sup>	Ease of cultivation rating <sup>o</sup>
Agastache	'Sangria'	17.5	100	15.8	19.0	3.5	3.5	4.0
Jelitto Seed		0-35	100	7-23	18-20	3-4	3-4	4
Baptisia	'Purple Smoke'	16.7	58	6.3	19.7	4.0	3.0	3.5
Gro'N'Sell		0-50	2-100	0-18	14-24	3-5	3-5	2-5
Digitalis	'Candy Mountain'	54.0	92	2.8	14.8	3.0	3.0	4.0
Gro'N'Sell		0-92	75-100	1-5	12-18	3	2-3	3-4
Echinacea	'Big Sky	29.0	89	12.5	20.8	4.5	4.5	5.0
Gro'N'Sell	Summer Sky'	0-54	67-100	7-18	19.5-24	4-5	4-5	5
Echinacea	'Doubledecker'	0	100	9.5	18.5	2.0	1.0	5.0
Gro'N'Sell		0	100	2-21	12-21	2-5	1-5	4-5
Echinops	'Star Frost'	3.5	83	2.8	17.8	3.5	2.5	3.5
Jelitto Seed		0-7	65-100	1.4	17.5-18	3-4	2-3	3-4
Gaillardia	'Amber Wheels'	2.0	100	16.2	15.5	2.0	1.0	4.0
Jelitto Seed		0-5	100	5-22	13-18	1-4	1-4	3-4
Leucanthemum	'Summer	0	100	29.5	19.7	3.0	4.0	5.0
Gro'N'Sell	Snowball'	0	100	10-56	14-25	3-5	2-5	4-5
Penstemon	'Sunburst	74.0	50	38.0	17.0	4.0	3.0	4.0
Jelitto Seed	Amethyst'	47-100	0-100	38	17	4	2-4	4



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2009 Perennial Cut Trials - Year 1

Species	Cultivar	Plants received alive (%)	Plants flowering (%)	Yield stems/plant <sup>①</sup>	Stem length (inches) <sup>②</sup>	Market appreciation rating <sup>②</sup>	Repeat again rating <sup>②</sup>	Ease of cultivation rating <sup>②</sup>
Agastache	‘Cotton Candy’	90.5	75.3	12.2	12.8	2.5	2.7	4.0
Terra Nova		80-100	2-100	0-39	8-18	2-4	1-4	3-5
Agastache	‘Summer Sky’	82.4	77.5	5.9	11.4	3.0	3.0	4.0
Terra Nova		30-100	10-100	0-14	5-21	3-4	1-4	4-5
Echinacea	‘Mac n’ Cheese’	97.4	78	1.2	10.1	3.5	4.0	4.0
Terra Nova		92-100	50-100	0-3	6-15	3-5	3-5	3-5
Echinacea	‘Merlot’	100.0	87.5	4.9	14.3	3.5	4.0	4.0
Terra Nova		100	50-100	1-8	10-20	3-5	3-5	3-5
Echinacea	‘Purity’	96.0	56.2	5.6	12.5	4.0	3.5	4.0
Terra Nova		80-100	1-100	1-15	8-19	3-4	3-5	2-5
Echinacea	‘Tiki Torch’	100.0	53	1.8	14.8	4.5	4.5	5.0
Terra Nova		100	0-100	0-5	10-18	2-5	2-5	4-5
Echinacea	‘Tomato Soup’	100.0	87.5	5.6	13.5	4.5	4.5	4.5
Terra Nova		100	50-100	2-15	10-19	3-5	3-5	3-5
Hedychium	‘Tahitian Flame’	94.4	0	0.3	18.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Terra Nova		80-100	0	0-1	18	3	1-4	2-3
Hellebore	‘Double Queen Mix’	100.0	16.8	1.0	7.75	3.5	3.0	4.0
Gro’N’Sell		100	0-50	0-3	5-10	3-4	3-5	3-4
Heuchera	‘Paris’	100.0	37.6	5.3	14.5	3.0	3.0	3.0
Terra Nova		100	0-100	0-19	10-21	3	2-3	3-5
Heuchera	‘Velvet Night’	100.0	11.6	0.5	12.0	3.0	3.5	3.0
Terra Nova		100	0-50	0-1	8-16	3	3-4	3
Monarda	‘Raspberry Wine’	100.0	77.5	13.3	18.8	4.0	5.0	3.5
Gro’N’Sel		100	10-100	8-21	15-20.5	3-5	3-5	2-5
Penstemon	‘Dark Towers’	100.0	0	.	.	3.0	3.0	3.0
Terra Nova		100	0	.	.	3	3	3

① Data 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.

② 1 to 5 scale, with 5 being the best.

## 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.

### 2009 Perennial Cut Flower Trial - Year 1

#### *Agastache* ‘Cotton Candy’

**Good Qualities:** Bright pink color (2); Good fragrance, would be a good filler flower; It had a nice odor, Deer don’t eat them, lots of blooms all summer, hope it’s a perennial here. **Problems:** Strong scent, may not winter over in zone 5; We didn’t care for the washed-out pink color and thought the flower looked “weedy”, we used it as a filler in bouquets, customers not crazy about it either; Scrawny-looking, pretty useless; Too short for most sales.

**Insect or Diseases:** None (3).

**Additional Comments:** Taller would be better, so we’ll see next year; I’ll give them one more chance, if they don’t look better next year, they are outa here, approximately 20% of the plants died by the end of the summer; Not big or bushy but it blooms a lot, Planted into amended, well-drained soil in a high tunnel, numerous plants were broken when unpacked and remaining were not as vigorous as agastache ‘Summer Sky’.

## Summary of Comments

### *Agastache* 'Summer Sky'

(Terra Nova)

**Good Qualities:** Fragrant (2); Beautiful purple flower (2); A good filler flower (2); Nice spiky shape; The flowers of 'Summer Sky' looked interesting and with potential market value. (F)

**Problems:** Very short (3); Strong scent, may not winter over in zone 5; Bloomed very late.

**Insect or Diseases:** No (2).

**Additional Comments:** Next year will tell more. I hope it survives the winter; Approximately 50% of the plants died by the end of the summer, planted into amended, well-drained soil in a high tunnel, numerous plants were broken when unpacked, 'Summer Sky' bloomed in the high tunnel on short stems, the flowers of 'Summer Sky' looked interesting and with potential market value.

### *Echinacea* 'Mac 'n Cheese'

(Terra Nova)

**Good Qualities:** Great yellow color (4); Cone prominent and petals more droopy like regular echinacea; Bright large yellow petals that fill the flowers, very little petal sag compared to other echinaceas; Nice cone; Non-drooping petals; I like this better than some of the paler yellow echinacea I've seen.

**Problems:** Stems too short, maybe they will be taller next year (2); My helpers did not like the color, we used only a few in bouquets; Hard to fault; Powdery mildew; Only one bloom per plant.

**Insect or Diseases:** No.

**Additional Comments:** Waiting for next year, started with small plugs, Approximately 40% of the plants died by the end of the summer.

### *Echinacea* 'Merlot'

(Terra Nova)

**Good Qualities:** Beautiful rich color (3); Good stem length; Extra large flower; Dark wine-colored stem, petals flare out, rather than droop as regular echinacea does, cone was not enlarged as in other echinacea, customers loved the color, and reported that it held up well - 7 days or more; Petals stand out rather than drooping, good flower size; Petals with good substance and horizontal, color deeper than straight species and to my eye, more attractive.

**Problems:** None (2); Short this year, I'm hoping for longer stems next year.

**Insect or Diseases:** No (2); Fungus and insect problems.

**Similar Species/cultivars:** 'Tomato Soup' and 'Tiki Torch'

**Additional Comments:** My favorite echinacea so far (but that isn't saying too much). Approximately 30% of the plants died by the end of the summer.

### *Echinacea* 'Purity'

(Terra Nova)

**Good Qualities:** Bright, white color (3); Large full center; Cone was a bright yellow; Non-drooping petals.

**Problems:** Stems were very short (2), too short for bouquets; Droopy petals and prominent cone as in standard echinacea; None; Maybe longer stems next year?

**Insect or Diseases:** No (2).

**Additional Comments:** Hoping next year it will be taller, we didn't use much of it because there were few stems and all were quite short; Approximately 50% of the plants died by the end of the summer.

### *Echinacea* 'Tiki Torch'

(Terra Nova)

**Good Qualities:** Outstanding color (5); Great stem length; Large full flower with no petal droop; Small cone and flared petals, customers loved it!; Color somewhat inconsistent from plant to plant.

**Problems:** At this point, plants lack vigor and height; None; Rather spindly petals; Short (first-year problem?).

**Insect or Diseases:** No.

**Similar Species/cultivars:** 'Tomato Soup' and 'Merlot'.

**Additional Comments:** Should be a winner if it survives the winter; Approximately 50% of the plants died by the end of the summer.

### *Echinacea* 'Tomato Soup'

(Terra Nova)

**Good Qualities:** Bright orange color (3); Wow! lots of branching, long stems, no petal droop; Small cone with tinges of red color, petals flare out rather than droop as in regular echinacea, customers wanted plants, they loved the color and long vase life; Interesting unusual color for echinacea, non-drooping petals.

**Problems:** Petals have narrow open spaces between each petal, not as full as 'Mac n' Cheese'; None so far.

**Insect or Diseases:** No.

**Similar Species/cultivars:** 'Merlot' and 'Tiki Torch'.

**Additional Comments:** Can't wait to see this one next year!; Approximately 40% of the plants died by the end of the summer; 'Tomato Soup' did not bloom prior to Sept. 26.

**Postharvest Recommendations:** I just used plain water.

### *Hedychium* 'Tahitian Flame'

(Terra Nova)

**Good Qualities:** Nice variegated foliage that can be used in bridal work; Great foliage color; Plant is growing well.

**Problems:** None; I was not sure how to treat this; Growing in greenhouse for longer season, then will dig, will not winter over.

**Insect or Diseases:** None (2).

**Additional Comments:** Near the end of the season I used some of the foliage in arrangements, 10-12 inches tall hold very well in the cooler, 2-3 weeks, these were very small to start to I kept them in small 4-inch pots all summer, they will be stored for planting in the spring, foliage still looking good 11/3/09; All but 1 died, no blooms, approximately 90% of the plants died by the end of the summer.

### *Hellebore* 'Double Queen Mix'

(Gro 'N' Sell)

**Good Qualities:** Deer don't eat them, double so far; Color varied within each flower.

**Problems:** No blooms yet, most died; Flowered after our markets in the cold fall weather, useful for corsages, not bouquet designs.

**Insect or Diseases:** None.

**Additional Comments:** Two bloomed double white this fall (Sept.), I'm hoping for other colors in the spring; Approximately 70% of the plants died by the end of the summer; Healthy plants with large leaves; Flowers look nice and were double, I hope the flower stems get longer as the plant becomes established.

### *Heuchera* 'Paris'

(Terra Nova)

**Good Qualities:** Average so far; Bright color, full stems.

**Problems:** Flower stalks were too short to cut; None; Too small a flower labor intensive to harvest; Much too short, hoping for longer stems next year.

**Insect or Diseases:** None.

**Similar Species/cultivars:** Seed grown 'Firefly'.

**Additional Comments:** Will move these to more sun for 2010; Approximately 20% of the plants died by the end of the summer.

### *Heuchera* 'Velvet Night'

(Terra Nova)

**Good qualities:** Dark green foliage is very attractive; Nice foliage, that can be used in bridal work.

**Problems:** No flowers; I have to add beneficial nematodes to all my heucheras and tiarellas each year to keep the root weevils at bay, costs money.



**Insect or Diseases:** See above, root weevils, rabbits can be a problem in some areas.

**Similar Species/cultivars:** 'Obsidian'.

**Additional Comments:** Approximately 100% of the plants died by the end of the summer; Those in the most sun bloomed, guess I need to move the others, beautiful foliage, I will use it in purple boutonnieres; 'Velvet Night' was the only heuchera of the two that I thought might have stems long enough for use as a cut flower.

### ***Monarda* 'Raspberry Wine'**

(Gro 'N' Sell)

**Good Qualities:** Large beautiful flowers (3); Fragrant with long stems; Prolific, good stem length, nice fall foliage too, very interesting bloom.

**Problems:** To the customer it is just a bee balm, nothing special; None.

**Insect or Diseases:** Very serious mildew.

**Additional Comments:** Approximately 10% of the plants died by the end of the summer, I love this plant! (B)



*Penstemon* 'Dark Towers'



*Monarda* 'Raspberry Wine'

### ***Penstemon* 'Dark Towers'**

(Terra Nova)

**Good Qualities:** All look healthy, but no blooms yet. maybe next year; Plants look very healthy but did not send up a flower spike this year.

**Problems:** Did not flower in year 1.

**Insect or Diseases:** No (2);

**Additional Comments:** These were planted in May 2009 into well-drained, amended soil in a raised bed in a high tunnel, drip irrigated, they grew vigorously and are nice large clumps as of December 4, 2009, they did not bloom in 2009.

## 2009 Perennial Cut Flower Trial - Year 2

### ***Agastache* 'Sangria' (Jelitto Seed)**

**Good Qualities:** Great fragrance (2); Great filler flower (2).

**Problems:** Stems are brittle; None.

**Insect or Diseases:** No.

### ***Baptisia* 'Purple Smoke' (Gro 'N' Sell)**

**Good Qualities:** Pretty purple pods; More delicate foliage than *Baptisia australis*, flower color pleasing; Beautiful color, lots of strong stems with good length.

**Problems:** Many of the plants did not survive - maybe it's not as hardy as *Baptisia australis*, which grows like a weed for me; Did not cut any plants, as they were only 14 inches tall.

**Insect or Diseases:** No.

**Additional Comments:** I liked the smaller scale of the plant and felt that the foliage could be useful as a filler in small table arrangements perhaps in Oasis (I did not test this), I'm hoping some will survive to year 3; We lost a lot of plants due to cultural problems: poor transplanting into clods, lack of water, lack of weed control, trying to keep the remaining plants alive.



*Baptisia* after harvest



*Baptisia* 'Purple Smoke'



*Gaillardia 'Amber Wheels'*



*Leucanthemum 'Summer Snowball'*

***Digitalis 'Candy Mountain'***

(Gro 'N' Sell)

**Good Qualities:** Suitable length for bouquets; Very floriferous, pleasing shape in bouquets, it just kept blooming all summer here - perhaps because we never had a real summer here in the Northeast.

**Problems:** Many of these did not survive the winter; One stem per plant and being a biennial equals high production costs; Difficult color to work with, since I was selling most of it at farmers' market I felt compelled to warn people that it is poisonous. That fact often "killed" the sale.

**Insect or Diseases:** No (2).

**Similar Species/cultivars:** Too many look-alikes available.

**Postharvest Recommendations:** We just used water and always picked early in the morning.

***Echinacea 'Big Sky Summer Sky'***

(Gro 'N' Sell)

**Good Qualities:** Beautiful color (3); Lots of strong stems with good length; Very little petal droop; Excellent petal substance.

**Problems:** Lots of short branches.

**Insect or Diseases:** A little slug damage to some petals.

**Additional Comments:** Excellent color and petal substance.

***Echinacea 'Double Decker'***

(Gro 'N' Sell)

**Good qualities:** Large flower; Flower color and stem length are great; It was very floriferous.

**Problems:** Too branchy, resulting in lots of short unusable stems, not a good cut flower, ugly double flowers on many; Not very many of the flowers were doubles; Many of the plants did not produce a "double" cone, of the ones that did I thought they had a ragged appearance like they were diseased, no one liked it so we stopped cutting it.

**Insect or Diseases:** No (2).

**Similar species/cultivars:** More like regular echinacea with drooping petals.

**Additional Comments:** Several bloomed in 2009, I can't sell something this weird in Nebraska — I have enough trouble just selling echinacea, which florists say looks "weedy".

***Echinops 'Star Frost'***

(Jelitto Seed)

**Good Qualities:** Spiky spherical shape interesting in bouquets, I liked it better before the florets opened.

**Problems:** Flowers tended to look "dirty" after florets opened.

**Insect or Diseases:** No.

**Similar Species/cultivars:** *Echinops ritro*.

**Additional Comments:** I would suggest picking and using when only a few florets are opened.

***Gaillardia 'Amber Wheels'***

(Jelitto Seed)

**Good Qualities:** A change of color from red gaillardias; Flowers were a great bicolor, most stems were good length and strong; Plants were covered with cheerful red/yellow blooms on wiry stems.

**Problems:** Vase life was short (2) - no more than 2 or 3 days; Weak stems, suffered severe rain damage; Hard to pick - stems tended to twist around one another as they grew.

**Insect or Diseases:** No.

**Additional Comments:** Would make a great addition to a perennial border, very floriferous.

***Leucanthemum 'Summer Snowball'***

(Gro 'N' Sell)

**Good qualities:** Prolific flowering (3); Very hardy and flowered all summer; Long bloom period, reminded me of a button mum, worked well as a filler in bouquets; Attractive flower.

**Problems:** Tended to naturally have a bent neck so customers thought it was drooping, because of this we stopped using it; Weak stem, maybe the location in my garden.

**Insect or Diseases:** No.

**Additional Comments:** This one might be marketable.

***Penstemon 'Sunburst Amethyst'***

(Jelitto Seed)

**Problems:** Did not make it through the winter; Stems too short to be useful.



*Penstemon 'Sunburst Amethyst'*