



## 2019 ASCFG Perennial Trial Report—First Year

John Dole, Nathan Jahnke, Ben Bergmann, and Judy Laushman

We love echinaceas and appreciate the parade of stunning new cultivars which appears every year. Not surprisingly, we had another one in the 2019 Perennial Trial, and it was a beauty. **Echinacea 'Coral Craze'** was top rated for its wonderful coral color that some called raspberry and others called orange. The petals were highlighted by the bright gold cone and dark burgundy stems. Plants produced about 3 sturdy stems per plant that averaged about 14 inches long. The finishing touch was a long vase life, averaging 11 days and ranging from 7 to 14 days. 'Coral Craze' is from Walters Gardens, as were all of the cultivars in the 2019 Trial.

**Achillea 'Sassy Summer Sunset'** continued the trend of ambiguous colors. One Trialer called it a "strong mustard yellow, some with orange petals" and another said "good dark orange". One just said "unique color", which was probably the safest way to describe the shade! Plants were productive, producing 8 stems/plant that averaged about 14 inches long, with a couple Trialers harvesting 24-inch stems. The other yarrow, **'Sassy Summer Sangria'**, had similar statistics, but with rose-pink flowers that aged to a vibrant red.

Of the two veronicas, **'Blue Skywalker'** was highest rated with purplish-blue flowers. Both it and **'Lavender Lightsaber'** produced 3-4 stems/plant that averaged 10-13 inches long in the first year.

The two kniphofias were similar in their statistics—around 3 stems/plant that averaged 12-13 inches long. **'Backdraft'** had a classic red hot poker look with reddish-orange buds that opened yellow, while **'Orange Blaze'** was a bright orange. Both cultivars were dinged for the typical kniphofia problem: lower florets turning brown before the spike is full.

Many growers have a love/hate relationship with grasses. Some love the airy botanical look, while others need something more substantial. Of the two cultivars in the Trial, **Pennisetum 'Puppy Love'** performed the best, producing 19 stems/plant that averaged about 16 inches long. **Panicum 'Apache Rose'** had much longer stems, but some Trialers preferred the more substantial heads on 'Puppy Love'.

The most unusual species in the Trial was the bush clematis **'Stand by Me'** with its swept-back purplish blue petals. Most of us are familiar with clematis as a vine, but a number of species form mounds. The stems were on the short side this year, around 10 inches, but they will hopefully be longer next year. While the flowers of most clematis cultivars command the attention, many growers are equally interested in the seedheads. 'Stand by Me' also had seedheads but they were fairly small at this stage.



### Participating Trialers

Rachael Ackerman  
Blue Sky Farm  
Lakeville, MN  
Zone 4

Mackenze Burkhart  
Michelle Elston  
Roots Cut Flower Farm  
Carlisle, PA  
Zone 6

Renee Clayton  
Wild Scallions Farm  
Timberlake, NC  
Zone 7

Nathan Jahnke  
John Dole  
NC State University  
Raleigh, NC  
Zone 7b

Tanis Clifton  
Happy Trails  
Flower Farm  
Dennis, MS  
Zone 7b

Jeanie McKewan  
Brightflower Farm  
Stockton, IL  
Zone 5a

Rebecca Perry  
Sabatia Flower Farm  
West Barnstable, MA  
Zone 6b

### Participating Company

Walters Gardens  
Zeeland, MI  
[www.WaltersGardens.com](http://www.WaltersGardens.com)



Finally, we had one phlox cultivar in the trial, **'Fashionably Early Flamingo'**. Several Trialers liked the plant, with one saying "I am keeping an eye on this one as a real keeper".

This is the first of a two-year trial. All cultivars flowered except for the two baptisias, which typically take at least two years. Stay tuned to *The Cut Flower Quarterly* for next year's report.

Based on the combined ratings score (market appreciation + repeat again + ease of cultivation), the following top-ranked cultivars will be nominated for the ASCFG Cut Flower of the Year: *Achillea* 'Sassy Summer Sunset', *Echinacea* 'Coral Craze', and *Veronica* 'Blue Skywalker'.

**Interpreting the trial results:** The numbers reported are averages of all the respondents. Many factors will affect the success of any cultivar. Our participants grow and harvest trial plants using several methods. 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 variety sounds interesting, but did not appear to do well, try it anyway; it may work well for you.

**Acknowledgments:** Thank you to each of the seven evaluators who returned their Trial data! We very much appreciate the time it takes to participate in the ASCFG Trials. We want to especially thank Tanis Clifton for being the first Trialer to return her evaluations! Thank you to Walters Gardens for providing the plant materials. We would also like to thank Sydney Ruppert and Ingram McCall for assisting with the NCSU trials. In preparing the report we did a bit of editing of the comments for space and clarity; our apologies if we've altered the tone or content of anyone's comments.

**Summary of Comments.** Note: many respondents did not make specific comments on each cultivar and in a few cases, comments have been shortened because of limited space. The number in a 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 (;).

### ***Achillea* 'Sassy Summer Sangria'**

**Good Qualities:** Vibrant red color (5); Great hot pink aging to an antique look, can be picked at either color stage; Strong straight stems; Lots of flowers; Lasted a long time, nice shape flower, sturdy stems; Large head size for first year production; Dried nicely; Easy to grow.

**Problems:** Stems rather short (4), I expect taller next year; Not highly productive (2); Stems were too branched; None that we have observed yet.

**Notable Insects and Diseases:** None (5).

**Similar Cultivars:** Any of the yarrows; We grow *Achillea* 'Moonshine', which we like; We had similar results from both the 'Sassy Summer Sangria' and 'Sassy Summer Sunset'; 'Paprika'?

**Postharvest Recommendations:** We use Chrysal Prof 2 and a Gerb tablet in all of our buckets; Did not use preservative, plain water only; After 4-5 days I

changed to plain water every two days  
**Comments:** Looking forward to seeing how much height we get next year, it was just too short to use this season (2); Color and reblooming of variety is desirable; We typically don't grow any *Achillea* besides 'Moonshine' (Yellow), because we find that colored varieties don't hold their color as well.

### ***Achillea* 'Sassy Summer Sunset'**

**Good Qualities:** Lovely mustard yellow (5), Great late summer color (2), some with orange petals; Strong stems (2); Easy to harvest (2); Rebloomed (2); The plants showed a decent tendency to send up new flowers stems in the fall after the main season in the early summer; Flower shape; Large heads for a first year perennial; Great height for the first season, I like the color better than the red, fit in well with our fall market bouquets, held in bouquets.

**Problems:** None (2), short and not highly productive.

**Notable Insects and Diseases:** None (5).

**Similar Cultivars:** Any of the yarrows; *Achillea* 'Moonshine'; 'Paprika'.

**Postharvest Recommendations:** We use Chrysal Prof 2 and a Gerb tablet in all of our buckets; Plain water, no preservative required; We cut when flowers were open but before too much pollen was showing and definitely before the color started to fade.

**Comments:** Glad to have had an opportunity to try these; We typically don't grow any *Achillea* besides 'Moonshine' (Yellow), because we find that colored varieties don't hold their color as well.

### ***Baptisia* 'Lemon Meringue' and 'Baptisia Pink Lemonade'**

**Note:** Plants did not flower in the first season, as is typical for baptisia.

We will have flowering results in next year's report. **Comments were the same for both cultivars.**

**Good Qualities:** Plants had good first-year foliage growth and seemed to establish well.

**Problems:** None so far; Too short to harvest the first season, no blooms.

**Notable Insects and Diseases:** None (4); Caterpillars completely defoli-

ated plants about mid-way through the summer.

**Similar Cultivars:** None listed.

**Comments:** Difficult time to be receiving plugs in general, lost most of these baptisia to stress due to lack of watering and just plain too busy to babysit them, many perennial plugs can handle the neglect, the baptisia were unable to; Too small for much info the first season, I can report back next year; The majority of the plants survived the season, hopefully, we will be able to draw some conclusions next season.

### ***Clematis* 'Stand By Me'**

**Good Qualities:** Lovely blue flower color (4); Cute, though rather small seedheads; Flowers were abundant; Nice size for bouquets, easy to work with compared to vining varieties; Interesting seed pods.

**Problems:** Flowers were downward facing (2); Short stems (first year growth may be the reason for the shortness) (2); Must be staked, short vase life, this flower was a beautiful color, however, it was very small, would probably be good for event work where vase life was not critical; First year growth was rather minimal; I think it needs to be staked, I didn't this first year and a lot of my stems were "L" shaped.

**Notable Insects and Diseases:** None (4); Groundhog nibbled off half the flower buds.

**Similar Cultivars:** None.

**Postharvest Recommendations:** Plain water; We harvested seedheads only and bunched them in 10's, stored in water and in cooler, also dried bundles as well; We use Chrysal Pro 2 and a Gerb tablet in all of our buckets, cooler set to 38 degrees.

**Comments:** Seems to have a lot of potential, I am hoping it grows more next year; Such an unexpected flower for a clematis, wish the flowers were more upright facing, we were unable to mix them in the mixed bunches we make, we will use it in clients' perennial gardens next year; Liked it, not a huge fan of the flowers, but liked the seedheads, will need to stake for next season.



**'Sassy Summer Sangria' and 'Sassy Summer Sunset'**

Photo Rachael Ackerman



### ***Echinacea 'Coral Craze'***

**Good Qualities:** Glorious bright color (6) that makes summer bouquets glow; Wonderful vase life (2); Stems were very thick and strong (2); Heat and drought tolerant, Bright gold cone; Darker stems provided a nice contrast; We liked the flower shape, the petals of this variety are not hanging downward like often happens; Cones large; This was an eye-catcher in a bouquet.

**Problems:** Too short (3); None that I noted; Stems were branched; Each stem had a branching habit which made for 3 or more flowers per stem, which is not our favorite for our needs; Not productive enough to harvest more than a flower or two at a time; We had so much insect pressure that the petals were damaged; Maybe year 2 or 3 will produce longer stems.

**Notable Insects and Diseases:** None (4); Corn beetles (northern corn rootworm beetle) will attack the petals if the flower is left too long; Most of the echinacea in our field will get aster yellows, we did not notice any yet on this new planting, the Japanese beetles damaged the petals quite a bit.

**Similar Cultivars:** We grow many echinaceas; There are some very similar but we do not grow any other echinacea on the farm.

**Postharvest Recommendations:** We use Chrysal Prof 2 and a Gerb tablet in all our buckets; We did use Chrysal gerbera tabs and holding solution; We had so much insect pressure that the petals were damaged, we picked off petals and used cones in our bouquets one week, they would have lasted even longer if we would have used dried.

**Comments:** I wish I had a 50-foot row of this gorgeous echinacea; Many times echinaceas have pieces of the petals missing from wasps or insects which make them unusable, we were pleasantly surprised it did not happen with these; Not very many plants survived the season, and as stated above, not all bloomed; I loved using the cones in bouquets, it added a beautiful pop of gold and interesting texture.



### ***Kniphofia 'Backdraft'***

**Good Qualities:** Bright color (4); Heat and drought tolerant, bloomed in early summer and in fall; Long bloom time, very nice flowers; Unique structure; Sturdy stem, easy to harvest, rebloomed; Flower shape.

**Problems:** Short vase life; None noted, other than the old blooms need to be cleaned off if you don't cut within a few days of it being ready; Short, and also because of the way the flower matures the bottom petals are dead by the time the entire flower is mature; Not hardy to zone 4.

**Notable Insects and Diseases:** None (4).

**Similar Cultivars:** None listed.

**Postharvest Recommendations:** We use Chrysal Prof 2 and a Gerb tablet in all of our buckets; We harvested when florets were all colored and bottom florets were open, stems went into clean water and held in the cooler; Used plain water

**Comments:** We planted this in one of our houses since I was skeptical of it being hardy in my zone, we really enjoyed this plant as did our customers; This plant could possibly be useful in design work, but not likely bouquet production; I liked using them and wish they were a bit hardier, they are not in our Twin Cities market at all so I think people found them interesting and unique.

### ***Kniphofia 'Orange Blaze'***

**Good Qualities:** Beautiful clear orange (6), with almost a hint of purple at the top; Sturdy straight stems (2); Heat and drought tolerant; Flower shape was desirable; Unique structure; Easy to harvest, rebloomed.

**Problems:** Bloomed very short (2), hopefully just because it is the first year; The way the flower matures the bottom petals are dead by the time the entire flower is mature; Not hardy to zone 4; Not as many blooms as 'Backdraft'.

**Notable Insects and Diseases:** None (4).

**Similar Cultivars:** None listed.

**Postharvest Recommendations:** Plain water; We harvested when florets were all colored and bottom florets were open, stems went into clean water and held in the cooler; We use Chrysal Prof 2 and a Gerb tablet in all of our buckets.

**Comments:** Color is difficult to use for our color palette; I liked using them and wish they were a bit hardier, they are not in our Twin Cities market at all so I think people found them interesting and unique; We planted this in one of our covered/heated spaces since I was skeptical about its hardiness in my zone.





**'Apache Rose'**

### ***Panicum* 'Apache Rose'**

**Good Qualities:** Long harvest window, nice color and sparkle for almost 2 months; Hard to say this first year, possibly a good color, just kind of wimpy; Loved the airiness and the blue green color when fresh, also loved that it dried without dropping seeds; Tinge of purple in the seedhead added an airy look, bunching grass, not invasive, easy to harvest and work with, nice addition for fall offerings

**Problems:** So far not very impressed, stems were not strong, not very tall, not a lot of bang for a buck; Seedheads are rather subtle and stems rather fine, but can harvest whole clumps at a time; None I can think of.

**Notable Insects and Diseases:** None (4).

**Similar Cultivars:** It reminds me a bit of 'Shenandoah'.

**Postharvest Recommendations:** We use Chrysal Prof 2 and a Gerb tablet in all of our buckets; Postharvest included Pro 2 for 4-5 days then changed to fresh water every 2 DAYS; I harvested when seedheads were fully mature and starting to color, grabbed in bunches and rubber banded and straight into clean water.

**Comments:** Not really impressed, overall weak plants the first year; Loved having it for fall, looking forward to getting more height on it.

### ***Pennisetum* 'Puppy Love'**

**Good Qualities:** Really heavy producer (5) of fuzzy grass seedheads; Nice variation in color in flowers, strong straight stems; Super easy to harvest; Refreshing structure, nice color, the plant was trying to re-grow mid-season, and might have produced a second cutting, which is impressive; This was a very erect grass, pretty fresh and dried; Out of all the trial perennials this was by far the one I was most surprised by, very impressive. It was awesome in our late-season market bouquets, it added a little bit of fall wisp without looking "weedy", I loved it.

**Problems:** None noted; Did not find anything particularly desirable about this cultivar; Seedheads fall apart late summer early fall; Stems were short, and never seemed to develop a nice color, always a mid brown, not very inspiring; The flower color and density of the grass plume are weak; Not hardy—that's my only complaint.

**Notable Insects and Diseases:** None (5); 3 plants were stunted for no apparent reason I could tell.

**Similar Cultivars:** *Pennisetum rubrum*; 'Little Bunny'? If I remember correctly that seedheads are lighter on that cultivar.

**Postharvest Recommendations:** We use Chrysal Pro 2 and a Gerb tablet in all of our buckets; Plain water; Postharvest included pro 2 for 4-5 days then changed to fresh water every 2 days; We used these in market bouquets, harvested when seed heads were mature and held in water until we made bouquets later that day. *NC State conducted vase life testing of this cultivar; see article in this issue for details.*

**Comments:** Not sure if this will overwinter, we are planning on mulching well with straw; We prefer a pennisetum which produces for a longer period of time and has a stronger color; Great for design work; Loved this, I would plant a large amount of them if they were hardy to zone 4.



**'Puppy Love'**

Photo Rachael Ackerman

### ***Phlox* 'Fashionably Early Flamingo'**

**Good Qualities:** No mildew noted (2); The florets held up in a vase better than most paniculatas I have had experience with, I also like the shape of the florets, almost saucer like and the petals are nicely rounded. I am keeping an eye on this one as a real keeper; Clean foliage, early bloom time; Large flowers and rebloomed; Nice soft cool pink, massive flower head where buds keep opening, giving each stem a rather long harvest window.

**Problems:** Stems were too short (4); Needed support (2); I wasn't a huge fan of the color— sorry! it wasn't popular with florists and it was a hard color to incorporate in our market bouquets; Flowers shatter easily; Extremely bright pink, could be difficult to pair with other flower colors; Not very productive.

**Notable Insects and Diseases:** No insect or disease problems noted (4).

**Similar Cultivars:** Lots of phlox on the market, Bailey's used to have a 'Candy' series, it reminds me a bit of that; Flower heads have a similar look to hydrangea; Flowers are similar shape to dianthus which is much easier to grow and produce more flowers.



*Postharvest Recommendations:* We harvested when buds were colored and just a couple florets had opened, into water and Chrysal #2; We use Chrysal Prof 2 and a Gerb tablet in all of our buckets.

*Comments:* Not bad for a phlox but it wasn't my favorite; Not a unique color, normal pink, nothing special, meh!; This cultivar may be way better next year; All the plants in the trial did very well for a year with continual heat waves and droughts, the generally severely dry weather likely helped prevent disease problems; The plants were not tough enough to survive our abuse upon arrival, we wish we had them earlier in the season, perhaps April, they might have benefited from natural rains and more time to monitor them, perhaps would have had a better survival rate.

#### **Veronica 'Blue Skywalker'**

*Good Qualities:* Great purple blue color (4); I love all veronicas, so I am thrilled to add another to the farm; Clean foliage, strong stems; Lots of flowering stems; Bumblebees adored it; We love the shape of veronicas.

*Problems:* Stems too short (2); Not a unique color, nothing special, meh!; Short cutting time, no re-bloom; Flower stalk was usually longer than the stem itself making most stems not usable; Bloom was very short at the optimal time for harvest.

*Notable Insects and Diseases:* None (2); We were pleased not to have disease issues which we so often have with veronicas.

*Similar Cultivars:* *Veronicastrum*, but the veronica colors are more desirable.

*Postharvest Recommendations:* Plain water.

*Comments:* We hope the second year will produce longer stems (3).

#### **Veronica 'Lavender Lightsaber'**

*Good Qualities:* Interesting pale lavender pink color (2), could be very useful for events, if grey bridesmaid dresses remain popular; Lots of flowering stems; Interesting structure for design



## **Exciting New Perennial Varieties from Seed**

**[www.jelitto.com](http://www.jelitto.com)**



STAUDENSAMEN · PERENNIAL SEEDS · GRAINES DE PLANTES VIVACES

**Production · Breeding · Seed Technology**

USA Office: 125 Chenoweth Ln. · Louisville, KY 40207  
Phone (502) 895-08 07 · Fax (502) 895-39 34 · [maryv@jelitto.com](mailto:maryv@jelitto.com)  
German Headquarters: P. O. Box 1264 · D-29685 Schwarmstedt  
Fax 01149-50 71-98 29-27 · [www.jelitto.com](http://www.jelitto.com) · [info@jelitto.com](mailto:info@jelitto.com)

work; Nice straight stem, no issues growing it.

*Problems:* Too short (4); Hopefully, will bloom taller next year (2); Inflorescence was longer than the stem making it hard to use; Not highly productive in its first year, lower petals tend to die before the whole flower is mature, light lavender color was less impressive than the 'Blue Skywalker'.

*Notable Insects and Diseases:* None (3).

*Similar Cultivars:* 'Royal Candles'? 'Icicle'? Those ones I have grown but they seem to get mildewy.

*Postharvest Recommendations:* None listed.

*Comments:* Maybe stems will be longer next year; Hoping for more height and no mildew next year.

Table 1. 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 shown in the range line, all respondents gave the same rating.

Species Cultivar	Plant survival and flowering (%)	Yield (stems/plant)	Stem length (in.) <sup>1</sup>	Market appreciation rating <sup>2</sup>	Ease of cultivation rating <sup>2</sup>	Grow again rating <sup>2</sup>	Average postharvest life (days)
Achillea Sassy	97	8.0	12.3	3.7	3.1	4.6	8.0
Summer Sangria	80-100	1-28	1-28	3-4	2-5	3-5	4-11
Achillea Sassy	97	7.9	13.6	4.3	3.8	4.8	7.0
Summer Sunset	80-100	1-28	6-24	3-5	2-5	4-5	4-10
Baptisia	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lemon Meringue							
Baptisia	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pink Lemonade							
Clematis	99	5.5	10.4	3.0	2.4	3.8	5.4
Stand by Me	95-100	2-10	6-12	2-4	1-4	2-5	2-10
Echinacea	92	3.3	13.6	4.5	4.1	4.7	11.4
Coral Craze	60-100	1-6	5-17	3-5	2-5	4-5	7-14
Kniphofia	97	3.6	13.7	3.8	2.8	4.8	5.7
Backdraft	80-100	1-10	10-24	3-5	1-5	4-5	3-7
Kniphofia	93	2.4	12.8	3.5	2.7	4.8	5.3
Orange Blaze	80-100	1-5	9-24	3-4	1-4	4-5	3-7
Panicum	100	7.9	23.9	3.7	3.6	4.6	10.9
Apache Rose	100	1-20	15-36	2-5	2-5	4-5	7-14
Pennisetum	93	19.4	16.0	3.3	4.0	4.9	11.5
Puppy Love	75-100	3-50	9-24	2-5	1-5	4-5	7-17
Phlox Fashionably	80	1.7	13.2	3.3	2.8	4.0	7.0
Early Flamingo	50-100	1-4	6-24	3-4	1-4	3-5	3-10
Veronica	100	3.0	12.9	3.7	4.2	5.0	7.4
Blue Skywalker	100	1-7	6-24	2-4	3-5	5	7-10
Veronica Lavender	96	3.8	9.9	2.5	3.8	4.5	7.0
Lightsaber	80-100	1-7	8-15	2-3	3-5	4-5	7

<sup>1</sup>Data shown are from the respondents who harvested stems. Some Trialers may have not harvested stems because they were too short.

<sup>2</sup>1 to 5 scale with 5 being the best; market appreciation ratings are based on sales to wholesalers, retailers and/or final consumers.