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To: ASCFG Seed Trial Participants
From: John Dole and Judy Laushman
Re: 2023 Seed Trial Instructions

Welcome to the National ASCFG Cut Flower Trial Program. As you know, results of all Trials are published in the Winter issue of *The Cut Flower Quarterly*, and often reprinted in several national trade magazines. Thanks to the growers who have assisted us in the past; your time and effort make the evaluations invaluable. Those who are joining us for the first time—kudos for stepping up.

Program guidelines and suggestions are outlined below for the new participants, and to refresh the memories of previous Trialers. Some of the material tested is completely new to the American market and you will be the first to see it. Other cultivars may not be new to America, but perhaps new to you. You are an important part of this research and we appreciate your work.

At the end of the growing season, you'll be sent a link to the NCSU database, where you enter your results. See the form below for the kind of data you should take for each variety.

The Research Process

A trial program is a complex research problem because of the diversity of climates, soils, scheduling, and most of all, people. While we cannot control the environment, we can make every effort to reduce the variability of the researchers. The more we grow the plants to the best of our abilities, the more useful will be the data. A few general suggestions:

1. Germinate the seed under controlled conditions; use warm temperatures (70-75F and high humidity). Insufficiently warm temperatures are one of the most common problems with seed germination. Remember, seeds which germinate under poor environmental conditions (e.g. too cold, too dry, and/or too diseased) seldom regain their initial vigor. Keep the propagation area free of insect and disease problems. In some cases, seeds may be direct sown to the field (e.g. sunflower). This should be done only if you regularly direct sow and can provide the water necessary for germination.
2. Transplant when seedlings are large enough to transfer to the ground. Space plants 9-12 inches apart or use a spacing with which you are comfortable. However, spacing plants closer than 9 inches may result in disease pressure, and wider spacing (>18 inches apart) is probably not realistic with most of these species.
3. Whenever possible, it is helpful to plant different cultivars of the same species side by side to allow them to be easily compared.
4. Fertilize and water similar to the other crops you grow.

Harvest

Harvest as you wish, to provide the best stem length, yield, and profit. Some of the most important data you will collect are yield per plant. Yield per plant is obtained by counting the stems harvested and dividing by the number of plants put out. These are data we hope you routinely keep on all crops you grow and so should not add significantly to your workload. We also would like some indication of average stem length. While we don't want you to measure every stem, we would like to know if we can expect 10-, 20-, 36-, or 48-inch long stems. Provide a range, such as 16-18 inches, if that is more accurate. Lastly, we are asking several questions concerning your opinion of these plants. Do your customers like them; are they something you would grow again; were they easy to cultivate; would you grow them again; and are they better than other cultivars already on the market?

Data Sheets

Please make as many copies of the Evaluation sheet as you need, and collect them in a notebook used specifically for ASCFG Seed Trial purposes. Please begin to fill out the sheets immediately.

The Forgotten Few

Experimental plantings are often started with the best intentions but as we chase our tails in the busy times ahead, they tend to be forgotten. Particularly because the numbers are relatively small, they are placed on the "back burner" and stay there—weed infested, underfed, and struggling simply to stay alive. Please don't allow this to happen. It is your responsibility to grow the cultivars to the best of your ability and to treat them as you would other crops you grow.

Share Your Experience!

Please take photos throughout your Trial season. We'd love to receive pictures of the propagation process, growing on and planting out, comparisons to other cultivars (the very purpose of the Trial), harvest, postharvest, use in floral designs, flowers being bought at a farmers' market, etc. Check out past Winter issues of the *Quarterly* to see what others have sent us.

Take advantage of your social media platforms to illustrate the ASCFG Trial Program. Please be discreet: if a variety isn't performing to your expectations, don't use Instagram to complain about it.

Reality Check

Some of the crops in the Trial may be absolute dogs in your climate. Do the best you can to grow them with good horticultural practices, but some plants would just as soon die as grow for you. If you have coaxed them, kissed their roots, and otherwise given up your firstborn and they still croak, don't feel bad. Concentrate your efforts on the good guys. Let us know about the good, the bad, and the ugly as soon as you can. Most important, have fun. With luck, you will find the next moneymaker for your business.

Thank you for providing this important service for your fellow ASCFG members.

If you have any questions, contact us.

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